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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JULY, 1971
VOL 29, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

The Schoolhouse Murder

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Once it had been a proud school, jealous of its heritage. Now it was a fortress of fear, terrorized beyond reason by an unseen, deadly Evil. There was only one thing to do, Mike Shayne knew. Somehow he must get into a death trap that had taken a girl's life—and now had him listed as next to die!

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THE SCHOOLHOUSE MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Frightened to the edge of madness, a tiny school fought for survival, as Mike Shayne went into a death trap that had taken a girl's life — and now was baited for him!



WHEN THE young man walked into Mike Shayne's office on Flagler Street in Miami, Florida, Lucy Hamilton didn't think at first that he looked like a client.

Mike Shayne is a private detective. Lots of folks think he's far and away the top man in his line on the whole South Florida Gold Coast. He charges top fees and the sky's the limit when he writes an expense account.

Most of his clients are rich and important, and they show all the signs of prosperity. Or else they're personal friends of Shayne or his beautiful private secretary. This fellow was neither.

He was young and neatly dressed, with short hair, a tie and jacket in spite of the broiling Miami heat. He had a vaguely scholarly air.

He walked straight to the desk where the big, redheaded detective

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



was sitting and stuck out his hand.

"You're Michael Shayne?" he asked.

Shayne shook hands, getting a surprisingly strong grip in return to his own.

"One of us has to be," he said, "and with only the two of us here I guess it has to be me."

The caller looked around. It was a measure of his degree of disturbance that he'd barely noticed Lucy Hamilton at her desk. Not many men ever got that disturbed.

"Uh — yes," he said. "I guess it does. Mr. Shayne, I need your help."

"Sit down," Shayne said, and indicated the chair beside his desk. "Suppose you tell me why you think you need a detective."

"I don't think," the young man said. "I know. Somebody's trying to ruin me. I need help to keep him from doing it."

"Why not call the police?" Shayne asked. "Better still get a lawyer to get you a court order to this person to stop whatever he's doing. That should fix things."

The big detective encountered a lot of would-be clients who thought they were being persecuted. Usually most of the trouble was in their own heads. He wasn't sure whether this man was just another one of that kind.

The young man gave him a level, intelligent look, not at all the kind of look that a psychopath or mentally disturbed person would be capable of.

"I don't know who's doing this to me," he said frankly. "That's one of the things I need you to find out for me. He's doing it though, and doing a good job while he's about it. What's more I think he's capable of going a lot farther than he has so far. I'm beginning to think he's even capable of killing me."

It was said with a complete and utter earnestness. Shayne let his eyes flick over to Lucy Hamilton's face. He could tell by the glance she gave him in return that she believed the young man. That counted for a lot with the big redhead.

One hand went up and the thumb and forefinger tugged at his ear lobe as he thought.

"That's a mouthful of accusation," Shayne said, "and you sound like you meant it. I'll need a lot more to go on than just your opinion though. I suppose you understand that?"

"Of course I do. My name's Bernie — that is Bernard — Gill. I'm a teacher of chemistry at Southside High School. It's only my second year there, and I thought I was doing well, but all of a sudden things just started to fall apart. I'm in danger of losing my position there, maybe of a lot worse. I'm convinced that it's no accident. Somebody is deliberately planning and carrying out a campaign to ruin me."

"The thing is," Shayne said, "do you have any real proof of all this?"

"Up till today I'd have had to

say no," Bernie Gill said. "Now I think I do have proof. I want you to come with me and I can show you. That is, if we get there before any more happens or this proof I spoke of is moved. It's important that we hurry, if you don't mind. I can give you more details on the way."

Shayne reached for his hat. "Let's go, boy."

The two of them walked down the two flights of stairs from the office to street level.

"You see," Bernie Gill explained, "for some time now certain accusations against me have been circulated among the students. I think the stories have gotten to the faculty and administration, maybe even the parents. As long as they were just rumors and such, what could I do?

"I realized that sooner or later whoever was doing this would have to supply some sort of proof. Just like you said there would have to be proof to hang me with. So I tried to put myself in his place and figure out what sort of proof he could manufacture to use against me."

"That was smart of you," Mike Shayne said.

"There's a lot at stake," Gill said. "I'm desperate. I had to try anything that might help. I figured out where he could plant his phony evidence. Today I think it's there. That's what I want you to see. Why, that's strange."

"What's strange?"

"That's my car at the curb there. But what's the pool of liquid under it? See, it's still dripping."

Mike Shayne looked at the little, gummy pool under the car. He dipped a finger and sniffed it. Then he raised the hood and looked carefully.

"That's brake fluid," he said to Gill. "You look and you'll see that the line from your master cylinder's been cut."

"Cut?"

"Yeah. You may be right. I think perhaps somebody does want to harm you."

II

BERNIE GILL and the detective took Mike Shayne's car instead of the teacher's.

"I'll call a mechanic I know to walk over and fix it for you," Shayne said. "Right now I want to get to this evidence you talk about just as fast as possible. Somebody might have wanted you killed in that car or he might just have wanted an accident in downtown traffic to delay you. In any case we better get a move on."

"Drive me to the school then," Gill said. "That's where the evidence is hidden."

Mike Shayne pushed his car through the heavy tourist traffic of central Dade County with a skill born of familiarity and long practice.

"Stop talking in circles, boy," he said gruffly. "It's time I knew exactly what all this is about. What's supposed to be wrong with you? What sort of evidence do you think has been faked? And why is all this going on? It would help a lot if you could tell me why. Believe me."

"I guess it is time I got more specific," the teacher said. "It's just that the whole thing is fantastic even to me. Mr. Shayne, I'm being accused of being a narcotics seller."

"A dope pusher?" Shayne asked with genuine surprise. It was the last thing he'd have guessed.

"Exactly. Not only that but the worst possible sort of thing. It's being put around the school that I'm selling the stuff to my own students. Believe me, that's the last thing on God's earth that I would do. I don't use narcotics myself or any other drug. I've never even smoked marijuana. If I did sell the stuff the last place on earth I'd do it would be at school."

"If nothing else," Shayne said, "that seems to me about the most stupid thing a teacher could try. He'd be spotted and exposed before he really got started."

"You're right," Gill said, "but it has been done. Two teachers in other schools have been caught since school started last September. Maybe that's where whoever is doing this to me got his idea in the first place."

"How do you know it is what's being done to you?" the redhead

asked. "Mightn't you have just been misinterpreting something?"

"Not a chance," Gill said. "In the first place one of my students came and told me right out. She was very much upset by what she'd heard, and she wanted to have it out with me face to face. I can tell you I was shocked."

"She?" Shayne asked.

"Her name is Lacy Boyd. She's a senior and well, frankly one of the best students I've got and a very fine girl."

Mike Shayne gave the man a brief sideways look. "From the tone of your voice, Mr. Gill, I'd say you were about to use the word woman instead of girl just then. Could I be right?"

"I don't know what you mean," Gill said. Then: "Oh, you mean do I think of her as a woman? As an attractive woman? Well, yes. I suppose I do. I've even taken her to dinner a couple of times after we'd been working late."

"Working late?"

"She's very interested in chemistry. Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Shayne. There was nothing out of the way. Lacy plans to go on and major in chemistry in college. She helps me set up certain experiments for the class to do. It's great experience for her."

"I'll bet it is," Shayne thought to himself. Over the years he'd grown wise to the ways of a young man and young woman who found each other attractive. They were likely to

help each other with experiments.

Aloud, he said: "Did anyone else mention this sort of thing to you besides the Boyd girl? You didn't just take her unsupported word?"

"I can't imagine why I shouldn't have," Gill said. "Lacy wouldn't lie to me, and I don't like your insinuating that she would. As it happens though that wasn't all. One of the students actually approached me to sell him acid — that's what they call one of the drugs."

"I know. I've heard of it. Who was the one who wanted to buy from you?"

"His name is Dzuka. That's D - z - u - k - a. Jim Dzuka. He's one of the wild crowd among the older students and I haven't the slightest doubt he was willing to buy from me. Those kids come from well-to-do families. They've got money enough to pamper every vice."

"What did you do?"

"I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. That I never even saw any sort of drug, let alone sold it. I was a teacher, not a drug peddler."

"What did he say then?"

"He said he knew I was lying to him. All the kids knew I was a supplier. He said I ought to wise up and not try to keep all the good stuff for Lacy and me. I made him leave my office then."

"Through the door?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Of course through the door. What do you mean by that?"



"I mean that if he'd talked that way to me, I'd have thrown the little fink out the window," Mike Shayne said. They'd gotten out of downtown traffic by now and were making good time towards the suburban high school. "If you'd done that, you might have killed the whole bag of rumors right there and then. The rest of them who were talking would have heard about it and known you were on the level. It would have been hard to go on bad-mouthing you after that."

"To kill a snake all you have to do is kill the head," Bernie Gill said. "I suppose you're right. That is if it was you he'd been talking to. It isn't that easy if you're a teacher though. A faculty member who put his hands on a student would be up on all sorts of charges. Maybe he'd even be arrested and taken to court."

"A drug-taking adolescent hardly rates as a delicate child in my book," Shayne said. "I'd figure if he was old enough to talk to me that

way, he was also old enough to take the consequences."

"You aren't a teacher," Gill reminded him.

"You bet I'm not. And if that's what it means, I'm not about to be. Anyway you should have called the cops in, or at least taken him up to your principal or dean or somebody with authority to make him eat his words. Why didn't you?"

"I — I suppose I should have," Bernie Gill said. "I'm not exactly sure why I didn't. Mostly I think because that would have made the whole thing official. That would be just what my enemy wanted."

Shayne gave the man another long look even as he drove. He was disappointed. At first glance he'd figured this young fellow as a more forceful type, a man who'd do something about it if he was attacked. He looked again at the intelligent eyes, the strong jaw, the general air of decision about Gill. Something struck a wrong note way back where Mike Shayne kept his instinct for judging people. He filed it away for future reference.

"You made a mistake," Shayne said. "Those people are like blackmailers. The one thing they can't stand, the thing they want least to happen, is for everything to come out in the open. Once you force a decision, drag things out in the light, they've got nothing to threaten you with any more."

"I don't know." Gill sounded stubborn and very much on the de-

fensive. "If I'd brought him up on charges he'd have lied. It would just have been his word against mine."

"Are you afraid your word wouldn't be good? Aren't you the teacher?"

"That's just what you don't understand. These days the student's word, especially if he happens to be known as a troublemaker, is always good against his teacher's. Against any decent adult's for that matter."

"You're right," Mike Shayne said. "I don't understand. What did you people in the schools ever do to let that sort of situation set itself up? When I was in school we respected our teachers and they respected each other."

"You were in school a long time ago."

"That may be, but it isn't just time that makes a difference. In this town Mike Shayne's word is still good. It would be if I was a teacher, or I'd stop teaching."

He turned the car into the concrete paved parking lot adjacent to the sprawling complex of shining new buildings that made up Southside High.

III

BERNLE GILL led Mike Shayne along the maze of clean, chrome and tile and acoustic ceilinged corridors to the big chemistry lab. School had let out an hour before, but there were still students on the

athletic fields and in the activity rooms and corridors. They passed a couple of teachers who greeted Gill by name.

The door to the lab was locked, but Mike Shayne noted that the lock was a cheap one. There were keys on the ring he always carried as a tool of his trade that would have opened it for him. It could also have been easily picked.

Bernie Gill noted his expression.

"The lock is supposed to protect the chemicals and lab equipment," he explained. "Actually the kids break in whenever they want. That's why I figured this would be a good place to plant evidence against me. I had a special lock put on my office that would take a real pro to pick."

"Any other reason you figured it'd be planted here?"

"Of course. Come on and let me show you."

Gill led the way to the far end of the big room, past the rows of sinks, burners and lab stations where the students worked out their experiments during class. Here, behind the instructor's desk and station were wall cupboards and a row of metal file cabinets and closets with numerous shelves. They were locked with hardware that any penknife could easily pry open.

The shelves were loaded with test tubes, glass tubing and other lab equipment. Some of them held glass jars and metal and plastic containers of vari-colored liquids, powders and chemicals of various sorts

that were used in the various experiments which were part of the courses.

"I get it," Mike Shayne said. "This would be a perfect place to hide dope right out in the open. Nobody'd notice it was any different from the rest of this stuff unless he had reason to know what he was looking for. He could accidentally find it whenever that would hurt you the most."

"That's exactly it. So I started keeping an exact personal inventory of everything here. Believe me it was plenty of trouble to begin with. Sometimes in the last weeks I've spent an extra hour an afternoon in here. It paid off though. Let me show you."

Gill unlocked one of the cabinets and showed Mike Shayne a row of tupperware containers filled with various white powdered chemicals. He took one of them off the back of a shelf and shook out most of the powder.

Buried in the white powder, and almost invisible unless a person knew just what to look for, were three little packets. Each contained a white powder of a slightly finer consistency than the chemical supposed to be there.

Bernie Gill handed them to Mike Shayne. "I want you to keep these. I haven't opened them yet, but I know they aren't supposed to be here. I'll bet you anything you like that analysis will show this is heroin or morphine."

Mike Shayne very carefully unfolded one of the little packets. He looked at the powder and took a quick sniff at it, being careful not to get any in his nostrils.

"I'd say heroin," the detective said. "Probably poor quality and heavily cut with chalk, but still heroin."

"There," Gill said. "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I? I think that's proof enough that somebody is out to get me."

"Don't jump ahead of yourself," the detective told him and put the three little packets in a fold of paper and then in his inside pocket.

"All this actually proves — that is if it really is heroin — is that dope was hidden in your lab. It could have been done to frame you. To frame some other teacher for that matter. Maybe a pusher left it here for one of his buyers to pick up. Lots of sellers use drops like this so they won't be seen passing merchandise. Whoever owns it could just have hidden it here to pick up later for his own use."

"You mean you don't believe me?" Bernie Gill asked.

"Don't be so touchy," Shayne said. "I didn't say that. What I did say was that this only proves that you have narcotics in your lab. Before it really means anything we have to prove who put it there and then go on and prove why. You mark me, I said prove. Before anything can be done we have to get

evidence that will stand up in court."

"I'm not worrying about courts," Gill said. "What I'm asking of you is to get this frame-up off my back."

"What frame-up you talking about, teach?" said a new voice.

Three teenage boys had come into the lab through the unlocked door about twenty feet from where the men stood. They had come very quietly and just in time to hear the young teacher's last remark.

Gill whirled on them.

"What in hell are you doing here?" he snapped, losing control of his nerves.

"It's our school too, teach," one of the boys said in an insolent tone. "Did you forget? I come in to pick up my notes."

Mike Shayne shifted slightly so that his back was to the wall, and appraised the newcomers with a cool, professional eye. All three were big for their age, fully as strong in a fight as most grown men and probably faster because of being younger. They wore dirty sports shirts, tight fitting striped jeans slacks with bell bottoms and sandals or tennis shoes.

All three had let their hair grow long and stay unwashed. One had a coarse tangle of black beard and a second a bushy, reddish mustache. They weren't the sort of boys Shayne would have wanted his son, had he ever had one, to pick for friends.



"I said get out of here," Gill shouted at them. "Can't you see I'm busy with this gentleman?"

"Even was he a gentleman, which he probably ain't," the clean-faced boy said, "what difference does that make to us. We're students. You ain't supposed to yell at students, Mr. Gill."

"Maybe Mr. Gill's just angry because it's us and not his girl friend," said the boy with the beard. "That right, Mr. Gill?"

Mike Shayne said nothing at all. He stood there and watched the boys. They were looking for trouble and he figured some sort of attack was brewing. When and if it

came, the big man was going to be ready to break it up. In the meantime the less they noticed him the better he liked it.

"I won't have any more of that talk, Dzuka," Gill said to the bearded boy. "If you have anything to say to me you know when my regular office hours are. You can see me then."

"We want to see you now," Jim Dzuka said. "There's a couple of questions we need to know about, and there isn't a better time to get answers."

"Yeah," said red mustache. "What's between you and Lacy, teach? You gonna treat her right?"

Gill made a quick move, and then checked himself. Shayne could see that it cost him considerable effort.

It was the bearded boy, Dzuka, who actually intervened. "Shut up, Harry. Any questions about Lacy come up, I'll do the asking. What you got there, Mr. Gill? I want to see what you dug out of that jar just now."

"What jar?"

"You know what jar, and you know what I'm talking about. You think you can get away with slipping hop to a nice kid like Lacy so you can get your hands on her, and not have us do something? You think that? You're crazy. I don't know who this hood with you is. Maybe your contact. I don't care. Not he nor you is gonna stop us getting that stuff."

"This is too much," said a white-

faced Gill. "I'm warning you for the last time I'll not listen to your crazy accusations. I won't—"

"Come on, boys," Dzuka said. "We got him with the goods this time. This is our chance to show up this lying, sneaking bum. We can't let him get away."

"Hold on there, boys," Mike Shayne spoke for the first time. "If you want to make charges against this man, there's a time and a place for it, and a way. Violence isn't it."

He spoke in a quiet tone. Mike Shayne never blustered or threatened. Like so many powerful men, he didn't have to. They might have listened to him, if Gill hadn't interrupted in a way they couldn't ignore.

"They're threatening our lives, Shayne," he said. "We've got to show them who's master here."

It was a bad choice of words that just made the boys angry.

"Let's go," Harry said. "We won't bother you, big man, if you keep out of it but we got to have what old teach had hid out there."

The three of them spread out to come in on the two men from different angles. Harry and the smooth-faced kid produced switchblade knives from the back pockets of their jeans. Jim Dzuka picked up a three-foot length of flexible copper tubing that lay on the sink at one of the work stations.

Shayne was interested in the teacher's reactions. The man didn't panic as many would have done.

He watched the knives with an appraising eye and picked up a nine-inch heavy brass pestle used to grind and mix chemicals in a mortar.

It would make a very nasty weapon in a close hand-to-hand fight. He spread his feet, balanced the brass mace, and waited for the attack. Outside in the sports area a group playing touch football were yelling as they ran.

Dzuka and Harry moved in on the teacher. The other boy watched Shayne, ready to move in if the big man intervened. Mike Shayne took the boy's measure. The redhead had a gun in his belt holster back of the right hip, but he had no intention of using it unless absolutely necessary. Even for a man as well known and respected in Miami as Mike Shayne shooting a school kid in the school itself would be hard to justify in court.

He stood so quietly that the two moving in on Gill tended to ignore his presence.

They walked stiff-legged and crouched forward with arms spread out like the claws of a crab. When Gill watched one of them the other would take a quick step forward, but they kept spread out so he couldn't face both at once, and if he moved to attack one of them the other could be on his back.

Harry kept flicking the point of his knife, jerking it quickly from side to side to confuse and catch Gill's eye. Dzuka swung the copper pipe

in short arcs so that it made a hissing sound in the air.

"These kids know their business," Shayne thought. Any ordinary man would have panicked at their remorseless approach. Bernie Gill didn't panic. He stood perfectly still and tried to move only his eyes. These he switched from one to the other of his attackers, trying not to watch one long enough so that the other could make a move.

It was a queer sort of tension while the two boys tried to get in close.

"They don't really want to kill him," Shayne thought, "only get close enough to grab him."

Then the tension broke. It was Bernie Gill who made his move.

He reached behind him, very carefully, with his left hand and caught hold of the open Tupperware jar from which he'd taken the little packets of heroin only minutes before. The lid hadn't been replaced and the loose chemical powder filled the container almost to the brim.

Gill knew exactly what he was about. His arm swung forward hurling a cloud of white powder into the faces of the two boys in front of him.

Harry got the biggest dose. He yelled, dropped his knife and clawed at his eyes.

Dzuka saw it coming and managed to close his eyes. The powder smeared his face and got into his hair, mouth and nostrils, and hung around his face like a cloud. For

just a moment he was helpless to defend himself.

That was apparently just what the teacher had counted on. He moved like a panther, jumping forward and swinging a terrible blow at Dzuka's head with the heavy brass pestle in his right hand.

The boy reacted as well as he could. He struck out blindly with the copper tubing, but it just cut empty air. If Mike Shayne hadn't been there, he would have been helpless before the teacher's assault.

Shayne moved with the speed and certainty of a trained and experienced professional. Before the boy in front of him knew what was happening, the big redhead kicked him in the stomach. The kid flew back, crashed into a desk and collapsed with the wind knocked out of him. He never had a chance to use the knife he'd been waving around.

Mike Shayne took two fast steps forward. His big right foot lashed out again, this time almost at floor level. He managed to kick Bernie Gill's feet out from under him. The teacher yelled in surprise and anger and went down on his face to the floor with a crash that almost knocked him unconscious. The murderous brass club flew out of his hand and went rolling and bouncing away down the aisle between two rows of student sinks.

By that time Shayne's big hands had Jim Dzuka by the shoulders. He raised the slighter and smaller youth right off his feet a couple of

feet into the air and shook him until his teeth rattled. When Shayne put him down, the boy's knees gave way, and he slid to the floor.

Harry was scrabbling blindly to find his knife.

Mike Shayne didn't even make a fist. He slapped the boy with the flat of one big palm and knocked him sprawling on top of Bernie Gill.

"That's enough of this damned nonsense for now," Mike Shayne said to no one in particular.

IV

THE TEACHER was the first to recover and scramble to his feet. "What the hell was the idea of tripping me?"

"If I hadn't you might have killed that kid," Mike Shayne said. "That thing you were trying to club him with could have bashed in his skull. How would that look on the record you're always talking about?"

"Oh."

"From now on you leave the fighting to me. I'll see you don't get hurt, and I won't kill any half-baked kid doing it. Okay?"

Bernie Gill just looked at him. Then he shook his head and some of the wild look left his eyes as he seemed to regain his composure.

"Let's get out of here."

"What's your hurry?" the big red-headed detective asked. "There's a couple of questions I want to ask these punks when they come to enough to answer."

"Later," Gill said. "Not here. Suppose somebody comes in? I could go to jail, or lose my job for sure, for beating up a student."

"You didn't lay a hand on one," Shayne pointed out.

"You try to explain that to the school board with irate parents and civil rights lawyers hollering all over the place," Gill said. "No. We get out of here and leave them to pick themselves up when they rub that stuff out of their eyes. We got what we came for. Let's get out while we're still ahead."

Mike Shayne wasn't quite as sure as the teacher that he really had what he'd come for. Way back in the big man's mind there was still the echo of a false note. He couldn't quite pin it down though, and that fact bothered him. He took a quick look around the lab.

"How about that stuff in their eyes?"

"It'll burn for a while, but it won't do any real damage. Come on and let's go."

They left the building and went back to Shayne's car.

"I'll drive you back downtown," Shayne said. "You can get your car patched up and go home. Where do you live anyway?"

Gill gave him the address of an apartment building not far from the school. "What are you going to do next?" he asked.

"I'm going to leave this powder we collected to be analyzed. Then I'm going to find out more about

this Dzuka kid. Do you figure he's the one behind all this?"

"I wish I knew," Gill said earnestly. "I honestly wish I knew. He must know who it is though, even if it's not him. This is the second time he's interfered."

"Sounds logical," Shayne said. "That's why I want to talk to the boy. While I'm at it I'd better see that Lacy girl too. Where can I find her?"

"You can't," Gill said decisively. "At least I suppose you could, but I don't want her bothered. Leave her out of this. I must insist."

They were downtown by then and close to Mike Shayne's office on Flagler Street. He spotted a rare parking place at the curb and pulled the car into it.

However, he didn't get out immediately.

"Now you look here," he told Gill. "You're hiring me to do a job. That's got to mean you know you can't do it all by yourself. So let me do it. I'm the pro here, and don't you forget it. If I think I have to talk to the mayor or your own mother that's my business."

"But look here, Shayne—"

"No. You look here. When you or any other client starts in telling me where to go and how to handle a case, then I drop that case like it was a red-hot potato. I mean it. Now whether you like it or not, this Lacy Boyd is already in your case right up to her chin. So where do I find her?"



Bernie Gill sat for a moment looking stubborn before he gave in.

"All right then," he said and gave the girl's home address. "Her parents are in Europe. She lives with an aunt."

He also gave Shayne the location of a couple of the most popular student hangouts where a girl might be found in the afternoon. The detective knew that Gill didn't want Lacy found, so he figured these were just to throw him off the track.

He gave Gill the number of a mechanic to call to replace his cut brake fluid line, left him at a pay booth, and went on up to his office.

Lucy Hamilton was busy typing up reports at her desk.

"How did it feel to be back in school, Michael?" she asked with a smile.

"Like that movie we saw years ago—*The Blackboard Jungle*," the detective said. "I think that young fellow's right about somebody really being out to get him."

"Oh?" she said.

Mike Shayne gave her a brief rundown of the fight in the lab.

"That explains something," Lucy Hamilton said right away. "About ten minutes ago you had a phone call. A man. He wouldn't leave his name, but the voice sounded like he might have been a young fellow. He told me I was to tell you to leave Lacy alone. That was all the message and then he hung up. At that point I didn't even know who Lacy was or whether he'd said lace or Lacy even."

Shayne nodded. "It fits."

He took the little packets of white powder Gill had found out of his coat pocket and told Lucy Hamilton to take them to a pharmacist friend for analysis.

"I'm going to try and dig up a few more facts on this case so I can begin to know where we stand," he said. "Don't count on seeing me for dinner, Angel, but I'll give you a call at home when I knock off for the night."

"Good," she said. "If it's not too late stop by the apartment for a couple of bottles of cold beer and I'll fix us a snack."

Mike Shayne drove to the hangouts for students that Bernie Gill had told him about. They were noisy, crowded and dirty. The customers were all kids. They looked at the big man as if he was some sort of freak.

Shayne didn't see Dzuka or either of the other boys who'd been in the fight in the chemistry lab. He de-

cided not to ask for them or for Lacy Boyd by name. Too many of the kids were watching him, and he didn't want it advertised around that he was looking for anyone in particular.

He got the sweetish reek of marijuana in his nostrils at one eating joint, and noticed that some of the kids at both places looked as if they were "high" on some dope or other.

"No wonder they're watching so close," he told himself. "They figure I'm a narcotics agent or anyway some sort of cop."

He decided to try Lacy Boyd's home address.

Four blocks from the second student joint Mike Shayne realized he was being followed by someone in a small foreign sports car.

V

JUST TO MAKE sure he was followed, Mike Shayne made four left turns in succession to circle the next block. The little foreign bug followed him faithfully through the first three turns. Then, when he took the fourth and started his second round of the block, the driver apparently realized that he'd been spotted. He kept on going straight down the street and was out of sight before Shayne could get turned around and follow him.

At no time had the big man been able to identify whoever it was that had been trailing him.

The apartment where Lacy Boyd lived with her aunt was an expensive

highrise, one of a group of three recently put up to cater to well-to-do residents and winter visitors.

Mike Shayne put his car in the visitors' section of the landscaped parking area, and took a self-service elevator up to the tenth floor. He found the apartment without any trouble.

His first surprise came when the door was opened in response to his ring.

The woman framed in the doorway was blonde and svelte and young. She wore a mini cocktail dress that emphasized every ripe and lovely curve of her body. Her eyes smiled at the big man with the same friendly welcome as her lips.

"Well now," she said in a vibrant, throaty tone. "I thought it would be Lacy or one of her young friends, but you're something else again. Indeed you are."

"Mrs. Boyd?" Shayne asked.

She tilted her head back to laugh upward at the big detective in front of her.

"Miss Boyd," she said. "Alma Boyd. Didn't anyone tell you?"

"Nobody told me anything."

"How sad," she said. "We might have met sooner, if only one of us had been told about the other."

Then another thought struck her. "You aren't trying to sell insurance or something? That would spoil everything."

"I'm not a salesman," Mike Shayne told her. "May I come in?"

"If you hadn't suggested it I'd

have dragged you in anyway," she said with that low, sexy laugh of hers. "By all means come in. It's been a lonely, dull afternoon, and it'd be a shame not to brighten it up now."

Shayne followed her into a large, expensively furnished living room. A huge picture window faced east to the sun-struck sparkle of the not-so-distant waters of Biscayne Bay.

She motioned to a small bar in one corner of the room. There was a half-filled silver shaker of martinis, but the detective spotted a bottle of one of his favorite brands of imported French brandy. He found a plain glass tumbler and poured himself a generous four fingers of the fiery amber liquid. She pointed to the bottle of soda, but he shook his head and took a swallow of the brandy straight from the glass.

"A drinker after my own heart," Alma Boyd said.

Shayne noticed that she was drinking the martinis from a glass similar to his. He smiled at her.

"Now put my curiosity to rest," she said then. "I don't suppose a kind magician sent you just to brighten up my day. That would be nice, but improbable. So tell me what you are doing here."

"When you look at me like that I'm not exactly sure I can remember myself," he said.

She toasted him and smiled over the rim of the glass. "Maybe it isn't important." They sat down on a big divan where they could look out

the window to the blue waters below.

"It is though," Shayne said. "I'm a detective. A private detective. I wanted to see if your niece could give me some information that might help with a case I've been employed to work on."

"I knew you were something exciting," she said. "I'm sorry, but Lacy's not at home yet. She usually doesn't come in until almost dinner time. It'd be nice if you waited though. It shouldn't be long now."

"Thanks," Mike Shayne said

They each had another swallow from their drinks.

"Maybe I could help you," she said after a moment. "Lacy hasn't got herself into any real trouble, has she? Sometimes I worry. The young think they're so sophisticated these days. Positively jaded about all the things that used to excite me at their age. Yet they're really very naive about a lot of things." She paused.

"They can't help that," Mike Shayne said. "Nobody's ever really invented a workable substitute for experience, have they?"

She gave him another long, appraising look. He could see a friendly warmth in her eyes.

"That was intelligent, Mr.—"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne."

"Mike Shayne? I think I've heard of you. Now I know why. All that man and intelligent too. No wonder you attract me. I want to know you better, Mike Shayne."

"I hope you do," he said, "but to

answer your question. No I don't think your niece is in any real trouble herself. I think she's just sort of an innocent bystander, but she might very well know enough to be a big help to me."

"Enough about what, Mr. Shayne?"

"To tell you the truth that's one of the things I'm trying to find out for myself. I'm not quite sure as yet. Has Lacy ever spoken to you about a Mr. Bernard Gill who teaches chemistry in Southside High?"

"Bernie Gill? Why of course she has. I've met him myself, both at the school and right here. He was a guest at a cocktail party I threw last month. Don't tell me that little man's mixed up in trouble?"

"He sure is." Mike Shayne went on and told her about Gill's suspicion that he was being framed as a narcotics seller.

"That little man a pusher!" Alma Boyd was frankly incredulous. "I'd never have thought it of him."

"He showed me some stuff hidden in his lab that looks to me like heroin."

"Are you sure?" she asked. "I mean are you sure it's heroin? And if it is was it put there to frame him or for some other reason? Maybe he put it there himself."

"I thought of that," Shayne said. "I don't think it likely though. If it was his to begin with, why all the dramatic bit of showing it to me?"

"Why indeed? But people are strange, Mike. You don't mind my

calling you Mike, do you?"

"Be my guest."

"Okay then, Mike. Now I want you to give me an honest answer. I mean don't pull any punches or try to spare my feelings or anything. I'm a big girl. I stopped expecting feelings to be spared a good many years ago, if you want the truth of it."

"I'll try to be honest with you," he said. "That is, if I know the truth myself I will."

"Okay then. Do you think Lacy has been taking dope herself, Mike? I don't mean just smoking pot once or twice. I suppose they all do that nowadays. I mean do you think she uses heroin?"

"I don't think so," Mike Shayne said. "You have to consider though, I've never seen Lacy or spoken to her. Only a doctor could tell you for sure anyway. What I do mean is that I haven't heard or found out anything so far in this case to indicate that she uses the stuff, much less that she's what anyone could call an addict."

"Oh, thank God," she said. "For a minute there I was afraid. She's—well—been withdrawn and depressed lately, not at all like herself. I couldn't help but wonder."

Shayne drank the rest of his brandy and she emptied her glass. They both got up to get refills.

"I hope I'm right," Shayne said, "for your sake as well as for hers."

"I'll drink to that."

They raised their glasses.



"One more thing. Have you ever heard Lacy talk about a boy named Dzuka? His first name is Jim, I think."

"This is getting silly," she said. She walked over to the picture window and stood holding her glass and looking out and down.

"Silly?"

"Yes. That's the word. Jimmy Dzuka was Lacy's steady boy friend in sophomore and junior years. After she came to live with me when her parents took the place in Paris he was in and out of this apartment almost as much as if he lived here. For a while I thought I had him to raise as well as Lacy."

"That's funny."

"What?"

"Bernie Gill never said anything to me about that. He had plenty of chance. Gill seemed to think it might

have been the Dzuka kid who wanted to frame him though. You'd think he'd have told me about as obvious a motive as jealousy."

"You certainly would. Besides, Jimmy isn't the sort of boy to frame anyone. A man as clever as I've always thought Mr. Gill to be would know that. Jimmy might beat someone up if he was jealous of him. He's a violent boy—very passionate. It's partly his ancestry I think. He might even try to kill someone he hated enough. But nothing so subtle as framing a man. It's not in him."

The phone rang. She got up and picked up the instrument. Shayne saw her listen and then her whole body seemed to stiffen. She turned a face, gone suddenly pale and drawn, toward the big detective.

"I don't believe it" she said into the instrument in a tense, unnatural voice. "I don't believe it, Chief Gentry. Not my Lacy. Not murder!"

VI

ALMA BOYD swayed and gripped the edge of the phone able to support herself. Mike Shayne thought for a moment that she might be going to faint. He walked over quickly and held out his hand for the phone.

"If that's Chief Will Gentry," he said, "let me talk to him. We're old friends."

She held out the instrument to him without saying anything, and he took it and spoke quickly.

"Will? Mike Shayne here. What are you talking about?"

"My God on the mountain," came the chief's bellow in his ear. "Now we can't even have a killing in this town without you getting the case before it happens. What are you doing there?"

"I'm here on another matter," Shayne said. "I'm not even sure it ties in, but maybe I can help. What's happened?"

"We've got a body," Chief Gentry said. "It was found in a car parked in the alley back of the New York Hotel downtown. It's a blonde about eighteen, and a real beauty. She's been murdered."

"Are you sure it's murder?"

"What do you mean, am I sure? Of course I'm sure. So would you be if you saw the body."

"What does that mean?"

"Somebody stabbed her twice through the heart and then went and cut her throat. The whole car's full of blood."

"Are you sure it's Lacy Boyd?"

"As sure as we can be before we get a fingerprint check. The car is registered to Lacy Boyd. The identification in the glove compartment and wallet is all in that name. Including a bank credit card with her picture pasted to it."

"I guess you know then," Shayne said heavily.

"We do," Will Gentry assured him. "Just to be sure though, you bring the aunt on down to the police morgue for a positive identifi-

cation. The coroner's starting an autopsy now. And Mike—”

“Yeah.”

“You don't have to tell the aunt yet, but we think this Lacy kid was given a massive dose of heroin sometime today.”

“Oh, hell,” Mike Shayne said.

“That isn't all either. Keep this under your hat until we're absolutely sure, but the Doc thinks we're going to find that she was pregnant. Now what sort of mess does that sound like to you?”

“It sounds bad,” Mike Shayne said. “The aunt looks like she's just about in shock right now. I'll drive her on downtown and meet you at the morgue. Maybe she'll remember something on the way that might help.”

“I hope so” Will Gentry said. “I really hope so. There's going to be a lot of screaming about this killing, Mike. This girl's from a prominent family, and you know how scared people are lately with all the violence going on. If we don't nail this stabber fast, they'll be wanting to nail my hide to the wall.”

“He's no different than any other killer,” Shayne said. “They all make mistakes we can get them by. You know it, Will.”

“I know it, but sometimes I wonder. What are you doing in this thing anyway? How does your case tie in?”

“I said I don't even know that it does tie in. I've only been on this one a few hours. Certainly it didn't

seem to have anything to do with murder.”

“If it does, I don't want you up to your usual tricks, old buddy. No holding out evidence to solve the thing all by yourself. The way things are these days, the regular force has got to look good to the public. I don't want the mayor and the city commission and the papers all on my neck just so you can make a grandstand play again.”

“You know I wouldn't do that to you, Will,” Mike Shayne said and hung up the phone.

Alma Boyd accepted Mike Shayne's offer to drive her downtown and stay with her afterwards. She made a single phone call to her attorney — Shayne recognized the name of a partner in one of Miami's most prominent firms — and asked him to put through an overseas phone call to Lacy's parents in Paris, notify them, and explain that she would phone in person later.

“I'm with a detective named Michael Shayne,” she told the lawyer. “He's going to the police with me.”

She listened a moment before hanging up.

“You have quite a name around town,” she said to Mike Shayne. “He said to trust you and do as you say. I couldn't be in better hands.”

“Thanks,” the big redhead said.

He didn't try to push the traffic on the ride down to police headquarters. Alma Boyd obviously needed time to get her balance and recover a bit from the initial shock

of the news. Only when he saw the color coming back into her face and the life to her eyes did he question her at all.

"It looks like a deliberate murder," he said then. "Chief Gentry doesn't see any chance of accident or suicide."

"No," she said. "It wouldn't be suicide. None of our family would do that. I'm sure Lacy wouldn't. Not even under the circumstances."

"Circumstances?"

"I don't know that I ought to say, because I don't really know for sure, but—Can I trust you, Mike?"

"I hope so. I'd like to be your friend, Alma," he said gravely.

She looked at his rugged face. "Yes," she said finally, "I think I can trust you, Mike Shayne. Please don't repeat this then. Mike, I'm just about sure that Lacy was about three months pregnant."

She waited to see how he would react.

Mike Shayne kept his voice impersonal. "Why do you think that? Did she say anything to you about it?"

"Oh, no. She didn't say a word. Lacy wouldn't. She was a proud and self-contained girl. I don't think she would have said anything until she made up her mind what to do. It's just that one woman can tell about another. Especially when they're very close and love each other very much. Lacy and I were closer than most aunts and nieces. I just knew,

somehow. Oh, from the way she looked at me. Little things."

"You said until she made up her mind? What did you mean by that?" Shayne asked.

"Oh," she said, "just the usual choices a girl has when she finds that a baby is on the way. She can go away and have the baby and quietly put it up for adoption. She can stay and have the baby and raise it herself. We have money enough so Lacy could have done that. She can have an abortion. It's easy enough now. Or she can try to make the man want to marry her and be a real father to their child."

"Which do you think Lacy would have chosen to do? You seem to have known her better than anybody else."

"How can I be sure? All I can do is make an educated guess."

"Then make your guess."

"I think she would have done everything possible to make the man want to marry her. Lacy wouldn't have been pregnant unless she thought they loved each other. She isn't—wasn't a promiscuous girl. If that failed, I think she would still have wanted to keep the baby and raise it herself. I'm just about sure she'd never give her own child to another woman, and I'm positive she wouldn't even consider an abortion."

"If you're right," Mike Shayne said, "then either choice she'd be likely to make would pose a problem for the father. If he didn't want

to marry her, I suppose he'd want her to have an abortion."

"Oh," she said. "I see now. You think the father might have tried to —might have murdered her? That is if she really was pregnant?"

"From the police viewpoint it'd be a natural deduction," Shayne said. "That's why I want you to tell Chief Gentry what you think."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure you should tell him. They'll find out anyway if she was pregnant. Then they'll look for the father. I'll look for him too. Do you know who it was?"

"No," she said. "No, I don't. At least not enough to even give you a name. Lacy and I were close, but not that close."

Shayne pulled his car into the police garage at headquarters to park.

The men on duty knew Mike Shayne and had been alerted to expect him and Alma Boyd. They passed him without challenge, and he led her along the clean, tiled corridors to the morgue.

Chief Gentry's right bower, Lieutenant Maine, was waiting for them there.

The murdered girl's body was on a wheeled stretcher in the center of the room. It was covered by a sheet, which the lieutenant pulled back enough to expose the face and head. The bloodstains had been cleaned away, but the jagged wound where the girl's throat had been cut was



clearly visible. The eyes of the corpse were closed.

Alma Boyd stood for a long moment looking down at the dead face of the niece she had loved so well. Mike Shayne could see what an effort it was costing her to maintain control.

Then she turned to the two men.

"That is my niece, Lacy Boyd," she said. "I want the man who murdered her brought to justice. I will pay a reward of ten thousand dollars for his arrest, and twice that if he's convicted. Find him, lieutenant. Find him, Mike Shayne."

VII

THE THREE OF them went from the cold aseptic police morgue to the comfortable, oak paneled office of Chief Will Gentry.

"There've been some new developments," Lieutenant Maine said. "I'll let the Chief tell you himself."

Chief Gentry offered them a drink from his private stock, which they both accepted gratefully. He saw that Alma Boyd was seated comfortably in a big leather chair near his desk.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Miss Boyd," he said. "We all realize what a terrible shock this whole unhappy thing must be to you. On the other hand I think you'll appreciate our position. It's our duty to bring the murderer to justice and to do it we must inquire into every possible lead that would be a help to us."

She looked at the Chief with a calm decision that surprised Mike Shayne. The shaken, grieving young woman of a few moments before had given way to a coldly reserved and capable person. Seeing the body itself seemed to have caused the change.

"Of course I understand," she said. "Believe me, I want the person or persons who killed my niece to be brought to the bar of justice. I'm willing to help at any cost."

She went on to tell Chief Gentry of her suspicions that Lacy had been pregnant. He seemed relieved to hear her say it.

"Some families try to cover that up," he said. "They think it's modest or something. Actually they just work to protect the criminal when they do so."

"That's the last thing I want," she said.

"Of course it is. Actually our coroner has already told us the girl was pregnant. Now we must know the name of the father. If he's innocent, he'll want the murderer caught as much as we do. In any case we have to check him out."

"I know," she said. "I wish I could tell you that. But I could only guess. I don't know his name."

"She told me that in the car," Mike Shayne said. For some reason that he couldn't define he was reluctant to have the name of Jimmy Dzuka brought up at this point

"Did she have a steady boyfriend?" the Chief asked, ignoring what Shayne had said.

"Up until a year ago, I'd have said yes," Alma said. "This last year though she's dated a number of boys. No one in particular often enough to call him a steady."

Chief Gentry looked disappointed. "Do the initials J. D. mean anything to you?"

He could see by her expression that they did. "Why do you ask?" she said.

"I'll tell you why. As soon as your niece's body was found in her car it was brought here, of course. We found she'd been given a massive injection of heroin in her left thigh."

Apparently she wasn't a regular user, at least as far as our medical men can determine up to now. While under the influence of the drug she was killed—not by the drug, but with a knife. She was pregnant.

"Her car was towed in for examination. She did own a small, two-seater, red XYZ convertible with a torn top, didn't she?"

Alma Boyd nodded. "Yes. An awful little bug. I never could see why she liked it."

Mike Shayne was glad none of them were watching his face. That description fitted the little car which had trailed him when he left the school. He hadn't been able to tell whether the driver was male or female. With the long hair the kids all wore, that would have taken a close-up look anyway. With the top of the car up, he hadn't had one or thought it important at the time. He still thought a man or boy had been driving.

"Well," Chief Gentry went on, "we're going over that car for prints or any other possible clue. Of course a lot of kids may have ridden with Lacy and left fingerprints. We'll have to check them all out. That's not what I wanted to say though."

He paused while they all took a swallow of their drinks, and then continued. "As a matter of routine our men searched the alley where the car was found. It wasn't easy. A place like that gets full of trash and garbage and whatnot. We went

through every bit of it with a fine tooth comb. We always do."

"She knows you've got a competent force, Will," Mike Shayne said. "Get on with it."

Will Gentry ignored him. "This time it paid off. One of our men found what we're just about dead sure is the murder weapon. We want you to look at it. Will you?"

She nodded, tight-lipped and grave.

Lieutenant Maine got a cardboard box about the size of a shoe box off a side table. It was one used to store evidence by the police. He put the box on the Chief's desk where the desk lamp would shine directly on the contents, and removed the lid. They all crowded close to the desk so that they could see what was inside.

It was a vicious looking switchblade knife with the blade locked in the open position. The blade was long and narrow like that of a dagger. It was streaked and stained for most of its four and a half inch length with brownish crusted dried blood. Open, the weapon was almost ten inches long. It lay there under the light and seemed to exude a malevolent aura of its own.

"The blood type of those stains matches that of your niece," the lieutenant said.

The Chief nodded. "This was found just as you see it where the murderer dropped it in a trash can not twenty feet from the dead girl's body."

Mike Shayne looked at Alma Boyd. Her face was stiff and strained.

She said, "Dear God, no! Poor Lacy. That awful thing."

"Now look carefully," Chief Gentry said. "The killer made a terrible mistake, from his point of view, that is, when he ditched that thing where we could find it. Must have lost his head and just wanted to get rid of it. He should have thrown it in the river. Then we'd never have found it but kids panic where an older man mightn't. Anyway, we did find it."

"It's just like the ones they all carry," Shayne said.

"No," Gentry told him. "This one's different. The man who owned it marked it with his name for us. If you look real closely at the base of the blade you see the maker's name and a type number stamped on one side. Turn it over like this"—he reached down and suited the action to the word—"and you'll see that somebody scratched his initials on the other side. He probably used one of those metal marking scribes tipped with a little chip of industrial diamond that the hardware and novelty stores sell. That part of it isn't too important. What is, is that he signed this weapon for us."

Gentry picked up a big magnifying glass from the top of his desk and held it over the knife. They all looked. As he'd said, two letters had been scratched into the shiny stain-

less steel. They were a capital J and a capital D.

"Do you recognize those?" Gentry asked.

"She does," Mike Shayne said, and wondered why he hated to say it.

"Yes," Alma Boyd agreed. "Those are the initials of one of Lacy's boyfriends. His name is Jimmy Dzuka. Up until a few months ago he was her steady. Then they broke up."

"Is the boy the jealous type?" Gentry asked.

"I'm afraid he is. A very emotional boy. Jealous and inclined to be violent. I would never have thought anything like this of him though. Never in the world. Why—I always thought that Jimmy and Lacy really loved each other. How could anyone who loved someone else do a thing like that to her? It isn't reasonable."

"Murder seldom is," Chief Gentry said. "In my job you see a lot of the results of both love and hate. They seem to blend into each other sometimes. After a while you know it's so. Did this boy ever threaten the girl, Miss Boyd?"

"Threaten, no," she said. "They had their fights, but I thought it was just kid stuff. As a matter of fact I hoped they'd make up. Do you think Jimmy was the father of Lacy's unborn child, Chief?"

Mike Shayne knew what was coming next.

"I think we'll let him tell us that himself," the Chief said. "Lieuten-

ant, I want an APB on this Dzuka kid. Bring him in. Any way you have to—but bring him in."

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE called Lucy Hamilton from Chief Gentry's office. When she didn't answer, he realized she'd probably stepped out for an early dinner.

"I'll take you to dinner myself," the redhead said to a much subdued Alma Boyd. "The news will be out by now and the reporters will be camped outside your apartment. If you go home they won't leave until they interview you. Better stay downtown with me where they won't find you."

She gave him a grateful smile. "Thanks. I'm afraid I'm still pretty much in shock. This all feels unreal to me still. I'm not up to reporters yet."

They had steaks at a quiet little place where Mike Shayne was well known. The papers were already out with a special edition featuring the murder, and radio and TV commentators carried the story of the hunt for Jimmy Dzuka. He was not at home or in any of his usual haunts, and police authorities all through the county had been alerted. An arrest was expected almost momentarily.

After dinner Shayne suggested they walk by his office.

"I want you to meet Lucy," he told Alma Boyd, and she nodded. "You want to stay away from home



for a while longer and I've got some calls to make anyway. I suppose Bernie Gill has been trying to get hold of me."

"Oh yes," Alma Boyd said. "Bernie Gill. We mustn't forget Professor Gill, must we?"

"He is my client," Shayne said, "and I suppose he'll think his case mixes into this murder business. What's the matter anyway? You sound as if you didn't like the man."

"To be perfectly frank I can't stand him. The few times he was at the house with Lacy I expected him to make a pass at one of us any minute and the thought of those hands of his touching me gave me chills."

"I thought you said it was you invited him for cocktails?"

"Did I? Well, they were my cocktails all right, but it seems to me

now that Lacy invited him. Does it matter?"

"I don't know," the big detective mused, and tugged at his ear lobe. They were walking the few blocks through downtown Miami from the restaurant to his office. "I wondered a while back why you didn't nominate him for the father of Lacy's child instead of Jimmy."

"Oh, no. That would have been an insult to Lacy's memory. Besides, if you think back, I didn't nominate anybody. Chief Gentry did that."

They walked up the two flights of stairs to Mike Shayne's office. He could see a light through the glass pane of the door and knew that Lucy Hamilton was back from dinner and waiting in the hope he'd contact her.

He opened the door and let Alma Boyd walk in ahead of him. He stepped in after her and pulled the door closed behind him. When he turned to face the room he saw Lucy Hamilton sitting at her desk.

As soon as he saw her face he knew that something was terribly wrong.

"Freeze," said a voice off to his right, "or so help me God I'll let you have it."

It was the boy Harry—the one with the bushy red mustache—who'd been in the fight at the chemistry lab that afternoon. He was flat against the wall near the door where Shayne couldn't have seen him until he got all the way into the office.

This time Harry had a gun in-

stead of a knife. It was an old German Walther that his father had probably brought home from World War Two. It packed enough punch to stop even a man as big as Shayne and the boy was nervous and jumpy enough to pull the trigger out of sheer excitement.

The big man stood right where he was, and was careful to make no overt move at all.

"Stand still," Shayne said to Alma Boyd. He knew that Lucy Hamilton realized the danger as well as he did.

"That's right. Everybody stand still," Harry said in a strained and nervous voice. "We don't want to hurt you unless we have to. Come on in, fellers."

Two other boys came out of the back office where they'd been standing. Shayne had never seen either one before. They had black side-burns, shocks of greasy black hair, and big switchblade knives like the one that had killed Lacy.

When she saw the knives Alma Boyd jumped. Mike Shayne put one hand on her shoulder to steady her.

"These gentlemen have been waiting to see you for about twenty minutes, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said.

She said it in such a perfectly natural tone, as if armed callers were an everyday occurrence, that somehow a lot of the tension snapped right there. The first one to recover was Harry.

"I know you got a rod," he told Mike Shayne. "Take it out and put

it on the floor and walk away from it. No tricks, or Phil and Louie will have to cut your girl at the desk there."

Mike Shayne complied. He wasn't going to risk having Lucy Hamilton hurt. Harry stuck the big forty-five in his own belt, back where his loose fringed shirt would cover it. All three of the boys seemed relieved when Shayne was disarmed.

"Now that you kids have had your fun," Shayne said, "why don't you tell me what this is all about?"

"We don't want to hurt you," Harry said. "I want you should know that. We will if we have to though. You must come with us. A friend of ours wants to talk to you."

"If you mean Jimmy Dzuka, I want to talk to him too."

"Sure you do," said the taller of the two dark boys. "You and all the fuzz in town."

"Not that way," Mike Shayne said. "I want to hear his story. I might even be on his side."

"I want to see Jimmy too." That was Alma Boyd and she surprised everyone when she spoke.

"Who are you?" the tall one asked.

"Shut up, Phil," Harry said. "I'm running this. Who are you, lady?"

"It's not important" Shayne said. He was afraid of what they might do if they knew.

"I'm Lacy's Aunt Alma," she said. "I've got a right to speak to Jimmy Dzuka, don't you think? If anybody has a right, I do."

The three of them seemed to think it over. Finally Harry spoke for them all.

"I don't know," he said, "but we can't leave anybody here to call the fuzz. I guess you better all come and we let Jimmy decide what to do with you. I'll ride with the shamus and Aunt Alma in his car and tell him where to drive. Phil, you and Louie take the girl friend here"— motioning to Lucy Hamilton — "in our wheels. If you lose me or anything funny happens, take and dump her in the Bay. That way big man here will behave himself. Won't you, shamus?"

"I'll go quietly because I want to," Mike Shayne said, "but I might as well warn you right now. If anything happens to Lucy I'll kill all three of you if it takes me twenty years to track you down and do it."

"He would too," Lucy Hamilton said in that same cheerful tone of hers.

IX

THEY DROVE south and west until the suburbs of the town metropolitan area thinned out to a straggle of fishing shacks and old frame buildings. The road they finally took was unpaved and twisted into the edge of the swamps that circle Miami to the west.

The boys had a fishing camp here on the edge of a black, silent pond. Off in the distance the lights of the city lit up the sky. The two cars

reached the shack together and doused their headlights.

The boy Louie went into the shack and got a kerosene lantern and lit it. Then he went down to the edge of the pond and held up the lantern so that it illumined his face. A moment later they heard the sound of oars and a skiff came in to the muddy shore.

Jim Dzuka was rowing. He got out and they all went into the shack together. Inside there were crude bunks against the walls, a gasoline stove and chairs and a table. They all sat at the table with the kerosene lamp in the center except for Harry. He sat at one of the bunks with the Walther still in his hand where he could watch the three captives.

The first to speak was Alma Boyd. She looked at Jimmy Dzuka across the crude table.

"Did you kill Lacy?" she asked him directly.

"No," he said, "I didn't. You know I wouldn't do that to Lacy, Aunt Alma."

They faced each other across the table. Outside in the night the frogs whooped at each other through the swamp and far off a bull alligator roared.

"I wish I could believe you," she said. "I really do wish I could believe you."

"You have to believe me. I'm telling the truth. You do know that, don't you?"

Mike Shayne slammed one big palm down on the rough table so

hard the dirty supper dishes which Jimmy Dzuka had eaten jumped and rattled and the lantern flame flickered.

"Stop playing games, both of you," he ordered. "It doesn't concern a tinker's dam whether she believes you, boy. It's the police that count. They'll prove you did murder today unless you can prove you didn't. That's what I want to know. What can you prove? What?"

"I didn't do it," the boy protested. "I swear I didn't."

"Don't swear it," Shayne said. "Prove it. I told you once the police can prove you killed her. Didn't you hear me?"

"It's a police frameup," Harry said.

Shayne spun to face him. "I've known Will Gentry for thirty years. He and his boys don't frame innocent kids. No. You have to show me some proof."

"How can they prove I did something I didn't do unless it's a frameup?"

"They can't. They know it to be true. They've got enough evidence to convict you though. They'll prove it."

"How?"

"All you kids think it's smart to own switchblade knives," Mike Shayne said. "Where's yours?"

"I lost it."

"That's right," Louie said. "I lost it."

"Shut up," Mike Shayne told him. "The police have your knife. Mark it with your initials. They found it in your feet from Lacy's dead body."

"It's a lie," Jimmy Dzuka said desperately. "I never killed her. Why would I?"

"She was pregnant," Shayne said. "You killed her because of that. That will stand up in court."

"You're plain crazy," Jimmy said. "If I was the father I'd have married her. Hell, I wanted to marry her anyway. She never said a word to me about being pregnant though."

"Could you have been the father, Jimmy?" Alma Boyd asked in a low voice.

He looked at her for a long while, or so it seemed, before he answered. "I guess I could have, Aunt Alma," he said seriously. "I guess I could. That's why I wanted to marry Lacy, though I never knew about any baby."

"That's fine," Shayne said, "that's just jim dandy. You tell that to the state's attorney and see if he believes it. He'll say jealousy and he'll hang you."

"You believe me, don't you?" Jimmy Dzuka asked.

"I don't know whether I believe you or not," Mike Shayne said. "There's something that bothers me about all this, and I can't remember what it is. When I do, I'll know if I believe you or not. First I need more answers. You got a drink here?"

The boy Phil got a bottle of cheap Jamaican rum out of a box of groceries and opened it. Shayne looked at the stuff with distaste, but poured himself two fingers and drank it.



"Were you jealous of Professor Gill?" he asked suddenly.

"I didn't like him," Dzuka said carefully.

"Mr. Gill is a rat fink," Harry said, and spat on the floor. "We all knew he wanted Lacy. Always watching her in class and standing where he could look down her dress. Things like that."

"Shut up, Harry," Dzuka said, but Shayne had already heard what he wanted to know.

"Did Mr. Gill sell dope to the kids?" he asked.

"If he did, we didn't know about it," Jimmy Dzuka said openly enough. "Some said he took it himself. They said he bought the habit when he was in Vietnam in the combat infantry three years back. We—I was afraid he'd try to hook Lacy so's he could sleep with her. She

said he hadn't. I just don't know."

"How come you showed up in the lab this afternoon?" Shayne asked.

"We were watching Gill in case he tried to give Lacy dope. She told me she was to meet him there. When I saw him go into the school with you, I followed."

"Yeah," Harry said, "that's right."

"Did you meet her anywhere this afternoon?" Shayne asked. "Be sure you tell me the truth now."

"I been telling you the truth. No, I didn't see her at all today. She called me on the phone. She was scared because you were with Gill. She didn't know what it meant."

"She wanted you to meet her?"

"How did you know?"

"I guessed," Mike Shayne said. "It would be the natural thing to do. She want you to meet her downtown?"

To Mike Shayne's surprise the boy said: "No, not downtown. But out here at the shack. I was to come out and wait for her. She had something she had to do first, but she'd come as soon as she could."

"What was the thing she had to do first?" Shayne asked.

"I don't know. I figured it was to have a talk with Aunt Alma. She was worried about you, Mr. Shayne. She followed you in her car for a while. Then when she drove home she saw your car in the apartment lot. I figured she wanted to ask her aunt what you were doing."

"Michael," Lucy Hamilton said, "something's wrong. Listen."

"I don't hear anything," Harry said.

"That's it," she said. "There isn't anything to hear. The frogs have all stopped croaking."

X

MIKE SHAYNE reached over very quietly and turned out the kerosene lamp. Sudden darkness enveloped the interior of the shack.

One of the boys started to push back his chair and the legs scraped on the board floor.

"You stay where you are," Mike Shayne said in a tone of command that brooked no argument. "Nobody move until I say so. The frogs stopped because something or somebody is out there that isn't natural."

"The cops," Louie said. "You make a run for the boat, Jimmy. We'll hold them off."

"Don't be a damn fool, son," Mike Shayne said. "Cops would have put a spotlight on this place as soon as I put the light out and be talking now. They'd have the place surrounded and pin us down."

"What he means," Alma Boyd said, "is that, if anybody's out there, it's Lacy's killer. He'll want to kill all of us. It's time to stop playing games, boys. Mr. Shayne's the professional. Let him take over."

Mike Shayne got up, moving very quietly, and stood looking out the single front window of the shack. Starlight and the reflected glow from the city gave some visibility.

"Give me back my gun," he said to the room in general:

"Give it to him," Jimmy Dzuka said, and was obeyed.

Shayne hefted the big forty-five and stuck it in his waistband.

"If you'd told me Lacy was to meet you here, I'd have known he'd have to come and been ready to bushwhack him when he got here. Now I've got to go out after him. You all stay here. Lie flat on the floor and don't get up or come out no matter what happens out there. Only shoot that Walther or jump him if he comes through the door."

"We can help," Harry said.

"We'll do our best," Alma echoed.

"You'll do what I tell you," Shayne said. "He'll have a rifle or a gun of some sort. He'll kill you like shooting tin cans if you bother him. Leave him to the pro."

"Why does he want to kill us?" Jimmy Dzuka asked.

"He has to kill you, boy," Mike Shayne said. "He doesn't know how much Lacy told you about him, so he doesn't dare let you live to talk to the cops. The thing Lacy had to do before she came here tonight was meet him downtown. She must have told him she would meet you here. Then he killed her with your knife. You were framed but good."

"Then he figured he'd come and kill you. He could do that and call the cops and say you were resisting arrest and get a medal. He didn't know we'd be here, of course, but

now he'll kill us all and blame that on you too."

"Who is he, Mike?" Alma Boyd asked.

"I'm about to find out," the big detective said. "Flat on the floor, all of you."

There was only one door to the homemade shack. Mike Shayne slid it open, stooped as low as he could, and went out in a long half run, half dive into the tall marsh grass.

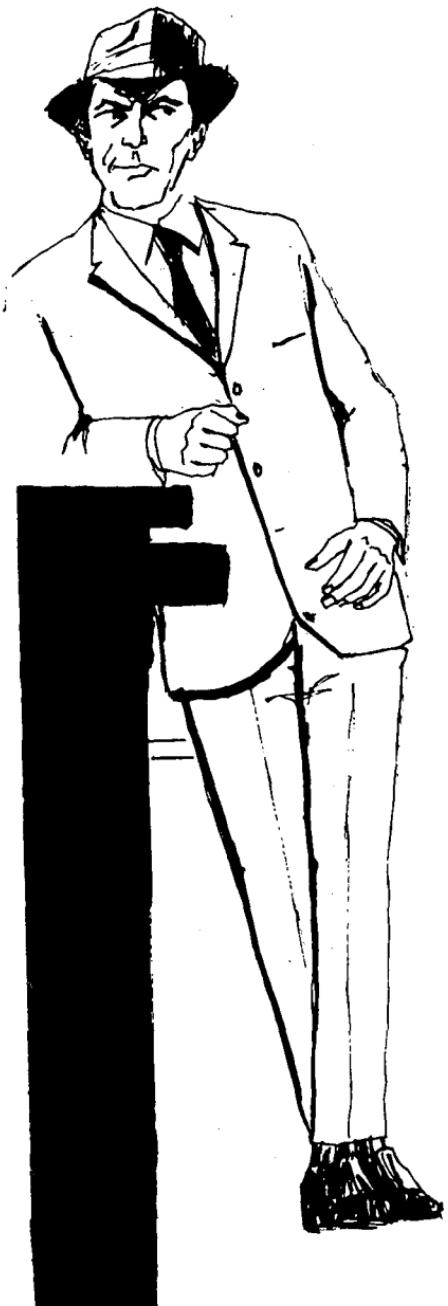
The rifle shot from the darkness was just a fraction of a second too late. The slug punched a ragged hole in the board wall of the shack.

Shayne saw the flash of the muzzle flash from a hundred yards down the dirt road they'd driven in by earlier.

Once the big detective got into the high grass he could be as silent and as deadly as one of the big diamondback rattlers which lived in the swamp. He wasn't afraid of anyone less skilled than an Indian sneaking up on him, and with night visibility cut to only a few feet in the grass, felt his big Colt's automatic equal to, or better than, a rifle.

He knew that the lake lay to the rear of the shack—that is, off to the left of the way he was facing—so he moved to his right. Within a matter of twenty feet he was in mud and water over the tops of his shoes. That was a bit of a shock.

Shayne had counted on having room to swing wide of the road and get around behind the killer. Now he realized the shack must stand on



a long ridge rising a foot or two out of the swamp and providing a fairly firm bed for the road.

He hadn't any room to maneuver, and might run face to face with the killer at any moment.

There was a sudden diversion from the shack. Harry—he guessed it was Harry—thought he saw something move and fired the old German Walther. The kick must have broken his wrist. The young fool had fired through the window, and the rifleman fired low through the thin wall below the sill. There was a howl from the wounded boy.

"The man's been trained," Shayne thought. "An amateur would have fired high through the window itself and wasted his shot. This guy's been in action before."

There was a murmur of voices from inside the shack. It must have surprised the killer. He'd probably expected to find Jimmy Dzuka alone or with one friend.

Now he called out, "Whoever you are in there, come out with your hands up. All I want is to arrest Jimmy Dzuka."

There was no answer, so he tried again. "You can all go except Jim Dzuka. Don't make me kill or hurt somebody. Jim is a murderer. I'm here to arrest him."

Mike Shayne was as fast and still as a snake in the high wet grass. He homed in on the voice which came from ahead and near the edge of the road. He couldn't recognize

the voice, but he surely could spot its location.

"Come out or I'll start shooting," the voice said again.

Mike Shayne rushed the man. He was almost on top of him, could see the dark blur of his figure, when the murderer heard or sensed his attack. He whirled and fired the rifle almost point blank. Shayne felt the bullet burn along his body on the left side between rib cage and arm. One rib was nicked.

He fell sideways and forward, thrashed out with his arms and caught an ankle in one big hand. He didn't try to use his own gun. Shayne wanted the murderer alive to talk and clear the boy in the shack.

He yanked at the ankle. The murderer came down in the wet mud. He had the rifle stock in both hands and he swung the barrel like a club. The first shock hit Shayne on the left side of his head, bruised the face and tore his ear. The big man pulled in his head like a turtle, hung onto the ankle and took the next blow on his shoulders. He heard yells from the direction of the shack as the boys came running.

Then he hunched forward, balled one big fist and swung a roundhouse punch into the face of the struggling killer. The man went limp.

A moment later so did Mike Shayne. He'd already taken enough punishment to kill a couple of ordinary men.

They bandaged Mike Shayne's

wounds and poured raw rum down his throat. By the time he came to they had the rifleman tied up with fishline until he couldn't move.

Somehow they got everyone into the two cars and headed back into the city.

Shayne looked at his erstwhile client, Bernie Gill, on the back seat of the car. "I'm taking you in to Will Gentry," he said. "You killed on his front step so I want him to have you."

An hour later, after Bernard Gill had been booked, they were all in Chief Gentry's office. An anxious Lucy Hamilton watched a police doctor rebandage Mike Shayne's wounds. She was worried because the redhead kept on talking to Gentry.

"He almost pulled it off," Shayne told the Chief. "All that stuff about being accused of pushing dope was just to call my attention to young Dzuka. Gill didn't sell dope. He used it. He put out those rumors and hid the stuff himself so he could find it.

"When Jimmy and the boys stumbled on us and started a fight, that was perfect for Gill. It just moved his timetable up."

"What was the idea?" Jimmy Dzuka said from across the office. "Why me?"

"Because he wanted Lacy," Shayne said. "He couldn't have her while you lived. You were the father of the child and she told him she was leaving him and going to marry you. In his torn-up junkie mind that

meant he'd kill you both, so he figured a plan. After the fight in the lab, he called her to meet him for one last talk. Then he made her helpless with that shot of heroin, drove her down to the alley, killed her with the knife he'd stolen from you, planted the knife to be found, and took off.

"If he'd left it at that he had you dead to rights. Murderers always go too far. Gill was no exception. Lacy had told him she was meeting you at the shack, so he knew where you'd be. He was afraid of what else you knew, so he didn't dare let you live. How would he know Lucy Hamilton and I and Alma Boyd and the other boys were all there too? He couldn't."

"Just one thing bothers me, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said. "You could have jumped those boys and arrested Jimmy when they first took

us out to the shack. When you didn't try, I knew you believed him when he said he was innocent. Why did you believe Jimmy?"

"I remembered a couple of things from the fight in the school lab," Mike Shayne said. "In that fight Gill was trying to kill Jimmy with a hunk of brass. That wasn't right, if Gill was the innocent party. On top of that Jimmy fought with a piece of copper tubing. His pals pulled knives. So would Jimmy if he had his. Later on, when he said he'd lost the knife and couldn't have used it on Lacy Boyd, I believed him. After that everything pointed to Bernie Gill."

"Thanks," Jimmy Dzuka said. He said it from his heart.

Alma Boyd looked at the redhead. "Will you take me home, Michael Shayne? I don't believe I can face the reporters alone."

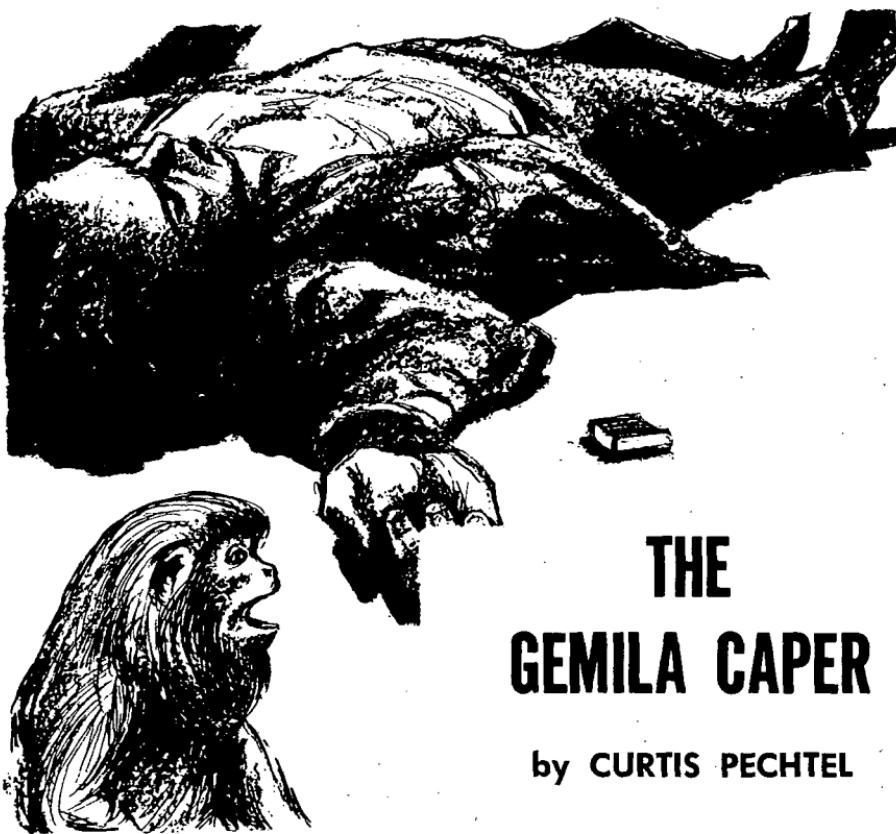
In the Next Issue—Another Complete Short Novel

DEATH COMES TO BREAKFAST

The Thrilling New MIKE SHAYNE Adventure

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Money, success, beautiful women — all these he had. Everything except a chance to stay alive, and that chance he had lost this blood-flecked day. Ringed by death threats, circled by killers, Mike Shayne sought to break the impossible riddle of the murder which couldn't happen — but somehow did!



THE GEMILA CAPER

by CURTIS PECHTEL

*One alone knew the way to an
incredible treasure. One alone—
and she could never tell . . .*

GEMILA scampered along the branch of the tree, her hips swiveling. Thaddeus Peters watched with mixed amusement and admiration. A car squealed to a stop behind him.

The car was a two-tone Cad convertible gleaming like an advertisement for a new wax on a TV com-

mercial. The man who got out was short, like his hair, and round. He wore a light blue suit that barely made it around his muscles and a blue and white striped sport shirt buttoned at the neck.

"Hey, Peters, com'ere," he shouted.

Peters took one step toward the

man. Gemila landed on his shoulder with a force that nearly knocked Peters over. She had been twenty-five feet from him and halfway up the tree. Peters stroked her side. "Don't worry, little Gemmy, I won't leave you."

The round man puffed up. "The boss wants you, Peters."

"About the act?"

"Yeah. About that ape."

Gemila grasped Peters' hair in her fist and was opening and closing her mouth rapidly. Peters hoped she wouldn't get too excited. He had learned the type of accident this ended in. "I'll put the monkey away and change clothes," he said.

"No. Mr. Albert says to bring you along right now and bring the ape with you."

"I'll have to get some fruit. Gemila doesn't perform—"

"Come on," the man said impatiently.

Peters had visions of their first paid engagement. He went.

They drove out of town, sped a mile along a dirt road, then turned into a long drive. Beyond was a house, large, white and expensive looking. Peters was awed. Gemila clung to him tightly, making soft noises.

Peters was glad to see the familiar mustached face of the grey-haired man when they came into the enormous living room. Mr. Albert had come backstage after the amateur show last Friday and asked a lot of questions about Gemmy.

"Peters, how would you like to make some real money?"

"Sure I would," Peters said. "You've got a place for my act?"

"In a way. I've got a job for that monkey of yours. You know the Natural History Museum, Peters?"

Peters slowly shook his head.

"It's a very fine museum, Peters. They've got a hall of precious stones. A very fine collection. Last year Mrs. Pabst gave them her collection too. You've heard of Mrs. Pabst, Peters?"

"Mrs. Pabst had some famous jewels. They're worth a fortune. They're all in the museum now. Even her ruby called the Envy of the Orient — worth four hundred thousand dollars, Peters. We're going to get all those stones."

Peters held his hand and waved it gently. He didn't like to refuse things to people. And the idea of a large collection of stones all gathered together was very attractive. He resisted the attraction.

"Thank you," he said. "I'd like to help but I've quit the business. I perform now."

"Sure. I know you do, Peters. Or you will. That's why I had you brought in. You're going to give the performance of your life. Peters, we'll be rich. You'll be rich."

Peters sighed. "I know. But I mean it. I've quit."

"You mean you are going to quit after this job?"

"No."

"Yes."

Peters recognized from Albert's voice that it wasn't advisable to argue. He wasn't the brightest but he was experienced. Instead he asked, "What's your plan?"

The man pointed a finger at Gemila, who edged further toward the back of Peters' neck. "That's who's going to do the job. Look." He got out a piece of paper and drew a picture. "Here's the room. It has two round windows just big enough for that beast to get through. The guard goes by once an hour and flashes his light around. He doesn't have to go in. The door, the walls, the floor, the ceiling — the whole works is wired. Their system is supposed to be foolproof. It is, for any human."

"Peters, you're going to teach that monk of yours to climb in one of those little windows, unlock those cases and bring us out all of that ice. He won't get caught. Even if he did, how would they put the pinch on a monkey?" He laughed and leaned back contentedly, his hands folded over the beginning of a pot.

Peters tried to figure something to say next. After a minute of utter silence, he decided on, "I can't teach her anything that difficult."

"That isn't what you told me last Friday. You said you could teach that monkey anything."

Peters gestured. "You know how t is..."

"No. I don't know how it is."

"Well, you sort of exaggerate when you're trying to sell an act."

"Peters, I believed you. I still do."

Peters made a few false starts. "I wouldn't—that is, I don't think —"

"Yes, you do. You're going to live here, Peters. Johnson will get your things from your room. You can have anything you need. I'll give you a week."

"A week! That's—"

The man smiled. "I thought you could. A month. That monk better know his business. You can go look the museum over. Fredric and Johnson will show you what it's all about."

Peters couldn't think of anything else to say so he mumbled, "I'll try."

"I know you will, Peters. Miss Hancock will be very anxious for you to."

Thaddeus Peters didn't want to hear the details about Miss Hancock.

He had first met Frieda Hancock when he was up for parole. Even in that atmosphere where he had to say "yes, sir" and "no, sir" and everybody had to act important and righteous, Frieda's liveliness and enthusiasm had sparkled through.

She was doing a study on what happened to prisoners when they were released so she was interested in him. Peters had been turned down at his previous parole hearing because he had no occupation—*Skilled Jewel Thief* didn't count with these people—though he felt that his abilities should have been useful in stealing papers and things like that

from the Communists and people like that, like the fellow on TV.

Frieda had been around to see him two days after he had gotten the bad news. There must be some abilities he had, she insisted. He had said no, the only time he hadn't gotten into trouble was when he was working with the animals on his aunt's farm. The aunt had been too old to have difficulties with. He and the animals had gotten along just fine.

Frieda had jumped on this. There must be some work he could do with animals. But Peters was a city boy and would be most unhappy in the country.

She had kept on thinking aloud to herself: Let's see. Circuses have animals. No. The parole board would never approve a circus. Maybe a helper to a vet. You haven't any training. But I'll look into it. Maybe a caretaker at the zoo—

Two days later she had a job for him taking care of monkeys and helping train them for a psychologist who was doing some sort of experiments. Peters didn't understand what it was all about but he loved it.

He was petting a big male one afternoon and tickling it behind the ears when the psychologist came into the animal room. He stared. "Peters, you're the first person that animal has ever allowed to touch him. You know, you've got a way with animals. You'd make a wonderful trainer."

When Frieda heard this, she took

it from there. Peters was allowed to make his choice of the next batch of young monkeys that came in. He had no trouble in selecting the affectionate little animal who was shortly named Gemila, which the psychologist said was Arabic for beautiful.

Gemila immediately started showing her ability to learn. Frieda immediately had visions of Peters and Gemila appearing in shows and on TV. Four months later they had appeared in their first amateur contest. Nobody else had been even close to winning against them.

Peters had always been a man with only an occasional need for women. He'd meet a receptive sort. They'd go to a movie or amusement park, have a hamburger and coffee and then go to his or her room for the rest of the evening or the night. Maybe they'd see each other again. Probably they wouldn't.

He had always been awed by women with education and good jobs, though he had never really known one. So he had been awed by Frieda and grateful to her. He was willing to do anything for her. After he had known her for a month, this included going straight. Actually he had intended to go straight after his first two stretches. That hadn't worked out when each time a glittering or sparkling opportunity had presented itself.

Frieda had pressed his hand with both of hers each time something good happened. Suddenly Peters started returning the hand squeezes.

He hugged her twice and she hugged him back. Suddenly she was a reachable object of awe.

There were cups of coffee. She watched him training Gemila. They had a date.

Then, after he and Gemila had won the amateur contest, Frieda had come back stage and thrown her arms around him and he was suddenly asking her to marry him. She hugged him again and harder, for an answer. That was when he had noticed Izzard Albert watching them.

THERE WAS A section at the back of the big house that had been easily fixed up to resemble the back of the museum. A room inside was fixed exactly like the precious gem room. The same cases, the same locks. The same type of stones, except these were glass.

Peters had no doubt he could train Gemila to get the stones out of the museum. He knew though that you couldn't hide how a fabulous job like cleaning out the museum—with a monkey yet—had been pulled off.

Somehow word would get around. The police would pick him up. They'd slap him around a bit in the basement of the station. They'd be particularly annoyed because he wouldn't be able to tell them where the stones were. No matter what he said he'd get sent off for life this time. And if any of the men involved



thought he talked too much, life wouldn't be very long.

He had never worried about such things before. Now that there was Frieda, it was different. He didn't like it. He wanted out.

He did try walking out one day when he seemed to be alone. Fredric suddenly appeared. Just stood there. Peters didn't need it in writing.

He set about training Gemila in earnest. He knew what would happen if he didn't. Frieda would be coming home late some night on the dark street near her apartment. Two men wearing rings on their fingers would step out from behind bushes. While one held her, the other would jab at her face. Maybe the first guy would take a turn too. She'd be found unconscious. It would take a month for all the swelling to go down and the cuts to heal.

If that didn't bring him around, Peters knew the second time would be worse.

Gemila liked rubbing her hands on the smooth stones and putting them in her mouth. So it took her three full days to learn that for each one she put in a cloth bag, she would receive a piece of banana, or a grape or maybe something to play with. And, of course, Peters' "Nice Gemmy!" She was soon after that getting them all in the bag in a hurry.

Next Peters left his protesting pet in a cage at the back of the house while he raced up to the room with the glittering glass gems. She would not have stayed behind an instant if she were free. Peters stuck his head out a round window and by means of a cord he had rigged up released Gemila.

There was a blur of brown fur as she charged the house. She went up the wall almost as easily as if she were climbing a tree, her strong fingers gripping the edge of the bricks. She hurtled through the window and threw herself on Peters' neck.

Here were cases of stones. One case had grapes and cherries and strawberries in it besides. Gemila tried seven times to reach through the glass. Peters showed her how to lift the lid. She had to be shown only once.

Then the case with more fruit in it was locked. The key was left in the lock for Gemila to work on. Instantly she had pulled it out and was sucking on it. Peters wired it down. Then he wired it down tighter. Gemila couldn't bring the key to her

mouth. So her mouth went to the key. Eventually in wrestling with it, she turned the key.

Peters rang a bell and showed her the lid could now be opened. But it was half a day before she turned the key again, this time quite deliberately. Peters quickly rang the bell and edged up the case lid. Then minutes later she opened it again. Then she did it five times in a row even though she had already eaten all the fruit out of it.

Another week went by before Gemila learned to put the key in the lock and turn it. She finally was tempted when enough fruit for a salad was locked in the case. She raced around the room and tried to get directly through the plate glass for two hours before she quieted down and used the key.

The rest wasn't difficult. She practiced using the key until she had it down perfectly. In a few days she was able to get all of the stones from all of the cases in a few minutes. Then she had to come in from outside the building, and then bring the gems back to Peters while he waited outside.

Gemila was ready.

But Peters took the additional nine days of the month he had been given—perfecting her, he explained to his two constant watchers. He was hoping something might happen. Nothing did.

Mr. Albert came in on a Tuesday, the last day of the month. "Well, you ready, Peters?"

Peters sensed an "or else" threat in Albert's tone. "Well, yeah. I guess so. I could really use another week, ten days to polish her up."

"We go tomorrow night," Albert announced.

"We" was Fredric, Johnson and Peters. They drove to the park where the Natural History Museum was located. They parked a mile from the museum so that the car wouldn't attract any attention to them. The area in back of the museum was deserted.

There was a half moon which kept the night from being completely dark. There were enough shadows though that the three men could have vanished in an instant if they were interrupted.

"The window is a little open," Fredric said. "All the monk has to do is push. The guard isn't due for forty-five minutes so he shouldn't foul things up."

Peters fastened the key and the first rolled-up bag to Gemila's collar. The little monkey scampered off as soon as she was released. She ran to the wall of the building, stood for a moment looking up at it. Then she climbed up as if it were a little incline.

Peters had always been amazed at her ability to climb. If there was any bit of molding or outcropping she could get fingers or toes around, she could climb. She could back down a wall almost as easily. Although she seldom glanced down, her toes found the right place to grasp.

She found the window and pushed. She disappeared. Ten minutes later she came out, descended the wall and ran to Peters. He petted her and untied the now nearly full bag. Gemila waited impatiently for him to finish the task and give her half a canned peach and a handful of peas, two more of a long list of very favored foods. He tied another bag on her collar. She was off again.

In eight minutes she was back. A third trip, a third bag. Then one final bag. No drama. No excitement. Just the waiting. It was all so simple.

"All right. Let's get out of here," Fredric said. "The guard may spot it his next round."

They followed a path through the park, got into the car and sped back to the mansion, being careful to observe the speed limit.

Izzy Albert greeted them with enthusiasm. Fredric with a broad grin threw out the four bags of gems on the table. Albert poured them out and spread them evenly over the table. "Beautiful. Beautiful. Millions of dollars worth. The best collection in the whole world." For three or four minutes he gazed at them.

Albert came back to business. "All right, men. Get those stones in the toasters. Fred, you and I've got a midnight plane to catch, so shake it."

He turned to Peters smiling. "I paid twenty-five bucks apiece to have those toasters made special. No customs agent will ever spot them." Then he added, "Peters, I'll

put seven to one you thought we were going to bump you off when you finished this job."

Albert sat grinning as if to keep Peters guessing about it. "Well, that's not the way we operate—unless we have to. Johnson is going to take you with him on a little vacation to Mexico. When I collect in Africa, you get your money. More than you could pick up in a couple years. Now aren't you glad you came along with us?"

Peters forced a smile. He sat in a chair and uneasily patted the nervous Gemmy. She was sleepy but Peters knew she would never go to sleep as long as he was up. He looked at the clock uneasily.

At quarter to eleven Johnson announced, "All set, boss."

"Good, Johnny. Fred, help him get the boxes in the rear of the wagon. I've fixed it for them to go on the same plane we do."

Peters was looking at the slowly moving clock every two minutes now.

Albert picked up a suitcase, came over to Peters and offered his hand. "Play it smart, Peters." He walked to the door, put a hand on Johnson's shoulder. "Take care," he said softly.

Peters was certain about that part of it. He wasn't sure about what Albert said in a low voice. It sounded like, "See you tomorrow." He didn't really need to hear. He very well knew what they intended.

Car doors slammed, a starter

growled and Peters could hear the wagon start down the drive. They watched the late show on TV. Gemmy was stretched out on Peters' left leg. Her hands very slowly kneaded his knee while he stroked her back. When the movie ended, Peters got up.

"Gemmy and I are going to bed, Johnson."

Gemila raced ahead up the stairs. Peters knew his plan wasn't working. He had to figure something else.

Johnson looked at the watch on his wrist. "Might as well stay down. We're going on a little trip in half an hour."

"That's tomorrow, I thought."

"Oh, sure, to Mexico. We stay in a motel tonight."

Peters could tell from the way he said it that Johnson was lying.

"I'll go get ready," Peters said and started up the first step.

Johnson didn't believe him either. He took his gun from its shoulder holster. "Don't be difficult, Peters."

The time had come when he had to act. Peters looked at the eight feet separating them. Johnson didn't want to shoot him here but he could and would.

Gemila was chattering in a low tone at the top of the staircase. Somehow she sensed the situation and Peters knew she was very upset. Suddenly he threw up his hands and in a loud, high-pitched voice pleaded, "No, Johnson. Please, no. You can have my share."

This was too much for Gemila.

There was a piercing shriek from above, half rage, half fear. Johnson's head jerked up. He raised his gun and fired. But he didn't have a chance of hitting the fury fury already on its way.

Gemila hit Johnson on the side of the face, knocking him back a step. Her fingers grabbed at his ears and nose.

Peters knew his monkey and was moving. All of Johnson's attention was on Gemila when he got there. Peters left it almost unfair as he wound up and smashed a round-house right into Johnson's jaw.

It was almost twenty minutes later that a car squeaked to a stop out front. Someone climbed the steps outside without any attempt to hide the approach. The front door knob rattled and the person knocked impatiently on the door.

Peters asked, "Who is it?"

"Police. Open up."

Peters opened the door cautiously. A tall man in a suit stood to one side, a gun in his hand. "You Peters?"

"Yeah. I thought you hadn't got the note. They already left for the airport." Peters hurriedly filled in what he knew.

The man called over his shoulder, "Get that on the radio." There was muffled sound and a figure took shape out of the shadows.

The man turned back to Peters, with Gemila on his shoulder making mouth noises. "Oh, we got the note all right and took care of the lady.

We also caught one of Albert's friends outside her apartment."

The man's eyes darted around the room. They looked carefully over the glowering Johnson bound to a chair. They accepted that. Then he blurted out, "Only how the hell did you get those stones? How the hell did you get that note in the room? Nobody can get in there."

Just as Peters opened his mouth another car came to a stop outside in a flurry of gravel. Moments later Frieda rushed in.

"Tad." She threw herself into his arms. Gemila grabbed a handful of hair to keep her balance. Finally Frieda glanced at the man and stepped back, embarrassed.

Peters twisted and pointed a finger at Gemila. She grasped it in one of her hands. He said as if there had been no interruption, "She got them. She left the note. I taught her. It took me three days to get her to leave it in the door like that."

"There's going to be a reward, you know," the man said. "I guess it gets it." He nodded toward Gemila.

Gemilla chirruped. Peters said, "Maybe we can buy you a fruit store, little Gemmy." He pulled Frieda back and hugged her. Gemila reached out and patted Frieda's hair and hung onto a strand of it.

Frieda pushed Thaddeus Peters back in sudden excitement. "Say, maybe we can get you two on a TV news show. Think of the advertising."



THE HERO

Soon . . . soon she would die.
He closed his eyes and smiled.
Then — then he would be alone . . .

by **NEWTON RHODES**

FOR MONTHS following the accident Vic Masters didn't care if he lived or died. However, he'd have vastly preferred to die if he'd been given a choice. But, of course, being

paralyzed and without even the power of speech, he had little to say about the matter.

Day after day he lay immobile, staring at the ceiling while Thelma prattled cheerfully, brought him things, washed him, helped to make him as comfortable as possible, tried to anticipate his every want. She hovered over him constantly. She wouldn't leave his side for thirty minutes at a stretch, day or night, and she wouldn't allow anyone else to touch him.

As soon as Thelma took him out of the hospital she let the private nurse go. It wasn't the expense — they could afford several private nurses — but Thelma had had nurse's training and she wanted to do everything for Vic Masters herself.

The nurse had been kind of cute and Masters resented Thelma's letting her go. He couldn't tell her so — and this made him seethe. *It isn't enough for her to make me an invalid, he thought. She forces me to look at nobody but her every minute of the day. She's jealous. With me flat on my back and more helpless than a baby, she's still jealous.*

The thought gave him a kind of bitter satisfaction. It was funny how little things could be so satisfying — and how other little things would almost drive you out of your mind. Like the way Thelma patted his cheek lovingly each time she gave him a drink of water. Always the

same cheek. Always the same way. *If she'd only slap me once, he thought. Anything to break the monotony.*

Ultimately, it was Thelma who gave Vic Masters the will to live. His resentment of her grew until it became a consuming hatred and he knew he had to live so that he could murder Thelma.

It was odd for a paralyzed man to think seriously about committing a murder. But he had absolutely nothing to do but think. And no matter what he tried to think about, it all came back to his physical ruin — and to Thelma.

The name Vic Masters should strike a chord — he was the same Vic Masters who played football for K. P. U. All-Conference tackle for three years, remember? A rugged giant of a man who gained lasting fame in the halls of K. P. U. when he blocked a kick and recovered for the winning touchdown against California in the Rose Bowl.

Anything at K. P. U. could have been Master's on a silver platter. He could have had the job of head coach if he'd wanted it. But Masters was after bigger things.

He was well on his way to becoming one of the all-time pro greats when the big scandal broke in the Western League. He'd been too greedy, too bold. He was convicted of accepting a bribe and throwing a game. He got off with a suspended sentence but he was kicked out of

organized football and plummeted out of the limelight.

For a time Vic Masters operated a bar in Chicago, a private club where the sports clan gathered to replay the great games of history, and to risk a few bucks on Master's games of chance in the back room. The walls were covered with pictures of Masters and news clippings of his feats on the gridiron.

He had a good thing going at his club, but again he tried to go too far too fast. One night he fractured the skull of a newspaper reporter who had written an expose on Vic Master's *sub-rosa* activities, pointing out that his dice and roulette tables were crooked as well as illegal.

With the help of a smart lawyer Masters beat the rap. But he was finished in Chicago. So, with Thelma's money, he started his own sporting goods company, manufacturing footballs, baseballs, gloves and bats, all emblazoned with the name "Vic Masters."

He had met Thelma in college. In the beginning she was just one of dozens of girls who hung around outside the locker room waiting for Vic Masters. But when the word got around that little Thelma Johnson had come into a tidy inheritance, Masters took a not very long second look and decided Thelma was the girl for him.

She had stuck with him through good and bad, her worshipful adoration never weakening. After they

started the sporting goods business, she often traveled with him, doing most of the driving so Masters could rest and keep in shape.

They were driving cross-country to a convention when Thelma fell asleep at the wheel and the car careened into a telephone pole. Thelma escaped with minor cuts and bruises, but Masters went through the windshield and suffered a permanent spinal injury and a crushed larynx. He was totally paralyzed from the waist down, had only limited use of one arm, and could not utter a sound.

After the doctors at the hospital had done all they could, Thelma moved him to their summer cottage on a secluded beach. Here, through the window, he could watch the breakers roll in and the gulls swoop over. At first it had suited Masters to move to the cottage. He had a strong distaste for having people feel sorry for him.

In the hospital he had alienated all visitors by turning his eyes to the wall and refusing to acknowledge their presence. In time, though, he came to think of the cottage as a dungeon, a place where Thelma wanted to hide him, the symbol of her guilt, from the eyes of the world.

Thelma hoped the isolation of the lonely beach would bring him a peaceful acceptance of his condition, and at the same time strengthen his efforts to improve.

"Darling," she would say softly as she stroked his cheek, "it could

be so much worse. You can see, you can hear and you can smell. You can still use your right arm and you'll soon be feeding yourself — if you try."

In response to the uplifting palaver Vic Masters would stare stonily at the ceiling, yearning to find the strength to wring her neck like a butcher wrings the neck of a chicken. If he'd been able to shout or throw something, it wouldn't have been so bad. But to have to rage inside with no way to release the tension is a most unhealthy thing.

What could be worse than to be helpless and utterly dependent upon someone you loathe? At times his hate for Thelma reached such monumental proportions that tears filled his eyes and his labored breath escaped in harsh, jerky sighs.

At such times Thelma would moan sympathetically, pat his cheek and lay her head on his chest.

"I'm right here," she'd say softly. "I'll always be right here, darling. Thelma understands."

Inwardly he was screaming in agonized silence, begging her to get out of his sight and leave him alone.

Wanting to be alone was quite a switch for Vic Masters. All his life he'd had an audience of rapt faces, whether he was on the gridiron or just entertaining friends or customers. Now he was face to face with his innermost thoughts, and all the thoughts were black and ugly. He hated every human on earth and

Thelma had a very special niche of vilification.

He hated her motherly attitude, the way she walked and the way she smiled. He hated her fresh, healthy beauty. Most of all, he hated her optimism.

"Oh, darling," she would say, "you're looking so much better today. I can tell you're improving. Here, darling, drink your tea. No, Vic, hold it yourself. I know you can do it. You can do anything if you try hard enough. Even walk, perhaps, someday. The doctor says there's a chance. We really have a lot to be thankful for, Vic. You could be dead, you know."

God, he thought, if only I were. And you were dead beside me.

Once he startled himself with the crazy notion that Thelma was planning to murder him. Well he thought, why shouldn't she? In what other way could she rid herself of the sight of him and her terrible guilt? In what other way could she ever be relieved of the burden of 250 pounds of utterly worthless flesh and bones? Why should she be chained forever to a living corpse?

Such thoughts gave him a feeling of panic and strengthened his resolve to murder her, to beat her to the draw. But how could he possibly bring it off?

One day when she laid her head on his chest, telling him of the birds and crabs she had seen on the beach that morning, he moved his right arm in such a way that his hand fell across

the back of her neck. He moved his fingers tentatively, caressing her neck, thinking: *If I only had the strength.*

From time to time, after this, he flexed the muscles in his arm for hours on end. After a few days he could feel the tendons tightening, grow more firm, the coordination returning. Finally he knew he could kill her now, any time he wished. He could easily choke her to death.

But he hesitated. Murdering Thelma in such a simple, obvious way had its drawbacks. They wouldn't electrocute him, probably — whoever heard of a paralyzed man being electrocuted? — but they would undoubtedly commit him to a state institution. That might be better than this, but it would be final indeed. There would be no return.

On the other hand, if he could find a way to get rid of her and still have her money, he might someday find a medical specialist who could make him well again. Under Thelma's will, everything went to him. So if he could develop a subtle plan for murder, a murder that looked like suicide, perhaps.

This was a problem worthy of concerted mental effort. Hour after hour he concentrated. He studied every object in his field of vision. He watched Thelma carefully, seeking some clue that would lead him to the commission of a perfect murder.

Thelma noticed that his interest in things had quickened, his eyes had brightened.

"You're doing beautifully, darling," she told him one day. "For the first time you seem to want to live. And your arm is almost like new. I think you should try to write notes more often; exercise your fingers. If you try hard enough you can do it." She patted his cheek. "Mind over matter, you know."

Mind over matter, he thought. *With this mind I'll twist the life from you.*

So he began to use his pad and pencil often, resting the pad on a pillow that Thelma placed across his stomach. Usually he wrote simple messages for her to read, requests for a particular food or drink, or observations about the weather.

Occasionally he wrote things deliberately calculated to hurt her, such as: *How can you smile and look so happy when you're the one who put me here?* On reading that message, she turned quickly and left the room; and for an hour he could hear her wracking sobs.

One day, as she placed a sleeping pill into his mouth, he had an inspiration. He held the pill under his tongue, only pretending to swallow it. When she left the room he dropped the pill into a glass and hid it under his robe. After the pill had dried he dumped it into an envelope he found on the table beside the bed.

Now he had the plan. He could hardly wait to accumulate enough pills to put Thelma to sleep.

During the next few weeks he managed to save a dozen pills. That

should be more than enough, he decided. He had read somewhere that eight or ten pills would kill the average person. But he couldn't afford a slipup — he wouldn't get a second chance. He wanted a few more pills.

Now he conceived a plan to give Thelma a motive for suicide and, at the same time, implicate another person Masters hated intensively — Bob Thompson.

Bob Thompson was an old-time friend who operated a small grocery store a few miles from their cottage. Since Masters's accident Thompson had gone out of his way to help the Masters and frequently made special trips to drop groceries by in the evening. It seemed to Masters that Thompson came by far too often and stayed too long.

Thompson was a friendly fellow and he seemed always to be smiling at Thelma. Several times lately Masters had had vivid dreams in which he saw Thompson come to the house late at night after he had gone to sleep.

When Masters wrote a note to Thelma complaining about Bob Thompson's visits, she seemed genuinely shocked.

"Why, Vic," she said, "Bob has been very nice to us. He only comes by on Tuesday and Saturday, and it's very helpful because I hate to leave you alone to go shopping. Surely darling, you don't think . . ."

Masters eyes burned as he stared at her with hatred. Finally he wrote

on a piece of paper: *I don't like him. Now give me a pill.*

"All right, darling," she said, patting his cheek. "You don't want to take too many of these. Dr. Jones said it could get to be a habit."

He stared at her stonily and held out his right hand. When she gave him a pill he pretended to put it into his mouth but waited until she had gone and deposited the pill with the others.

His plan now involved Bob Thompson as well as Thelma. Surreptitiously when alone, he began writing a fictitious diary to supposedly cover a period of several weeks. One notation read:

I'm becoming terribly worried about Thelma. Her affair with Bob Thompson seems to be tearing her to pieces. I suggested that she put me in a home because she's too young to waste her life on an invalid. This she refuses to do. She acts as though she's a martyr because she's responsible for my condition. She wants Bob, yet she feels guilty. Sometimes she's so depressed that I'm afraid for her sanity.

Under a later date he wrote: *If only I could reach someone outside. Thelma's fits of depression are growing worse. She's close to the breaking point. I'm afraid. If only I could do something to help her. Also, her affair with Bob is reaching a critical point. I heard them talking last night when they thought I was asleep. Thelma said she couldn't go on any longer. Bob wanted her to run away with*



him but she refused. I don't know what's going to happen. I've written letters to Dr. Jones, begging him to come out to see me, but I'm afraid Thelma never mailed them. Unless I can get word to somebody, no telling what might happen.

He continued in this vein for what represented several weeks of entries in the diary. He was careful to keep the pad in which he wrote well hidden in the bed. Since he never left the bed, there was little danger of Thelma discovering it.

He decided that Tuesday morning was the time for action. That evening

Thompson would come by with the groceries. It was satisfying that Thompson would be the one to discover the tragedy. Vic Masters would tell Thompson, by note, that Thelma had suddenly passed out after becoming hysterical and gulping down several pills — for what reason he, Vic, didn't know. Later he would cook Thompson's goose by turning the diary over to the police. At the least it would ruin Thompson in the community.

Before Bob Thompson arrived Masters would be alone with the corpse for the rest of the day, of course, without any way to obtain food. In the eyes of the public this might even make him somewhat of a hero, he thought.

After breakfast on Tuesday Thelma went out to the garden, so Masters crushed the sleeping pills, working them into fine powder. Now, to find a way to put them in her cup when they had their mid-morning coffee together.

It was easy. When Thelma set the coffee pot on the table and prepared to pour, he stopped her and wrote on a piece of paper: *Are you sure you turned the stove off? I smell smoke.*

She smiled. "I'm pretty sure, darling, but I'll check." He had counted on this. She never failed to humor him.

She left the room and he quickly dumped the contents of the envelope into her cup, then filled the cup with coffee. "Everything's all right, darling," she said returning. "The stove's

off. Oh, thank you for pouring my coffee."

Again he wrote on the paper: *I feel good. Let's celebrate. Put some rum in our coffee.* The rum, he felt, would mask any taste the heavy concentration of barbiturates might produce.

She patted his cheek. "Let's do celebrate. It's a good idea."

She poured a shot of rum into each cup of coffee. They touched their cups together and drank.

"To us, darling," she said.

To me — my future, he thought.

She looked at him tenderly then lay her head gently on his chest and her hand reached for his head. Her tiny fingers caressed his ear.

"Darling, I've been thinking," she said. "About Bob, I mean. You're right. It isn't really necessary for him to come around at all. So I told him not to deliver the groceries any more."

A pang of fear shot through his chest. He fumbled for his pencil and wrote: *Who will deliver groceries?*

Her head was turned away and she didn't realize he was trying to ask her something. "Oh I feel so pleasant . . . and sleepy," she said. "You don't mind if I take a nap, do you?"

He grasped her long hair and pulled her up.

"What's the matter, darling?" she said thickly, her eyes closed.

He slapped her hard and shook her head. Finally she opened her eyes and read the note. Then she

slumped down again, mumbling, "Nobody darling. Nobody will bother you. I'll pick up — groceries — Saturday." She was breathing hard. "Got to sleep, honey. Tired."

Quickly he wrote: *Call Bob. Important. Must call Bob.* Then he slapped her viciously and shook her time after time, but to no avail. She was unconscious, breathing laboriously, irregularly, her entire weight across him.

He racked his brain. Who was likely to come to the cottage? No one had for weeks except Bob Thompson. Would anybody try to call and, on receiving no answer, come to investigate? Of course not. Who would call Vic Masters?

How many days could he last without food?

A sudden thought struck him. Water. He felt on the stand beside the bed. No water there. He could see the pitcher across the room. Thelma hadn't gotten around to filling it up.

He lay there staring at the pitcher until Thelma stopped breathing.

He was already thirsty. *God, for a drink of water.* Any kind of liquid.

He felt again on the table. An empty glass. He flung it across the room. The rum was out of reach. He found the coffee pot and shook it. Empty. Thelma had made only two cups.

He felt for Thelma's unfinished cup of drugged coffee. It was almost half full.

Vic Masters wondered if it would be enough.

A FATHER DAVID NOONE NOVELET



THE THING IN LOVERS' LANE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

*Madman? . . . Lecher? . . . Simple man of God?
What was the dark secret of Father Kling — the strange
secret he took with him to a bullet-scarred grave?*



FATHER DAVID NOONE, assistant pastor of Saint Monica's parish, enjoyed nothing more than the evening's game of chess with Father James Malloy. They played winter and summer, except during Holy Week, and Father Noone usually won.

He liked winning; it was the single bit of indulgence he allowed himself in an otherwise rigid routine.

"Another game, David," Father Malloy said, surrendering his king to the inevitable checkmate. "This has been a good week for you."

"Spring is in the air, Jimmy." David Noone started picking up the pieces and transferring them to the

felt-lined wooden box where they would rest until the following evening. "Have you seen Father Kling around this evening?"

"Not since supper. He said he had some calls to make."

Father Noone nodded. The routine at Saint Monica's had changed with the coming of Father Kling. Now, even on the coolish Sunday mornings of early April, he was the center of an ever-widening circle of giggling teen-age girls who gathered after each of the later masses to chat with him about the vital inconsequentialities of their young lives.

It was all harmless enough, though Father Noone realized that the ailing

monsignor might take a different view of things if he were around.

It was the monsignor's protracted illness that had brought Father Kling to Saint Monica's in the first place, when it became obvious that David Noone would be acting pastor for a time. He avoided the title of it, of course, because to everyone the monsignor's absence was only a temporary thing. He was still the pastor of Saint Monica's, and probably would be until the day he died. He was not a man to give up voluntarily the thing he'd striven for most of his life.

The situation was a difficult one for Father Noone, but he'd managed to make the best of it. And though his duties in the monsignor's absence had increased greatly, he still found time for the nightly chess game with Father Malloy.

This night, as he left Malloy in the rectory and headed across the cindered parking lot toward the men's club meeting in the school hall, he saw a familiar figure loom suddenly before him.

"Father Kling—George?" David Noone said.

"Yes, father. It's me."

"Oh! I was looking for you, George."

Father Kling stepped into the circle of light that shown down on the neat rows of parked cars. David Noone always marveled at the uniformity of the cars, even at the busiest mass on a Sunday morning. They'd never had a parking lot ac-

cident since he'd been at Saint Monica's.

"I have some calls to make, father," the younger priest said.

"Oh?" The unformed question remained in David Noone's mind. What had Father Kling been searching for among the rows of cars? Who had he been searching for?

"I'll see you later. All right?"

"Sure. Sure, George." Noone watched the young priest hurry away, oddly troubled by the encounter. It was not like Father Kling to be like that. Not at all. He thought about it for some moments, watching until he saw the young priest's car come out of the rectory driveway. Then Noone continued on to the men's club meeting.

FATHER NOONE was awakened at four in the morning by the persistent shaking of a bathrobed Father Malloy, who stood above his bed like some dark angel.

"Telephone—it's Detective Stephens from police headquarters. He says he has to talk to you and nobody else."

He'd known Stephens casually for a couple of years, but the man had never phoned him in the dead of night before. He roused himself with a sigh and felt his way downstairs to the telephone. Some day they'd have to install an extension in the bedroom.

"Hello?"

"Father Noone?"

"Yes." He recognized the familiar

harshness of the detective's voice.
"What is it, Stephens?"

"A mess, Father. You'd better come down. We have a dead man here. He may be Father Kling from your church."

"My God!" Father Noone steadied himself against the wall, feeling the room suddenly begin to spin.

"I'll have a squad car pick you up in ten minutes, Father."

"Yes."

"Father? I'm terribly sorry I had to tell you like that."

"Was it an automobile accident?"

"Not exactly. I'll explain when you get here, Father."

"All right."

Noone hung up and went vaguely about the business of dressing, wondering what awful fate had befallen Father Kling in those few hours since he'd last been seen.

The word was passed to Father Malloy as briefly as possible. David Noone was at the curb waiting when the squad car pulled up.

The ride through the darkened, deserted city was something of a nightmare, even to Father Noone, who'd driven off on early morning sick calls too numerous to remember. People died at four in the morning. People were born then too, and made love, and prayed to God. But mostly they died.

The ride was a nightmare, but the worst was yet to come.

"This way, Father," Detective Stephens had said, meeting him at



the door. "I'll have to ask you to identify the body."

"Certainly."

And then the long walk down the whitewashed corridor that led to the medical examiner's office in the next building. Men, detectives, reporters, standing around in little silent groups. Waiting.

The sheet was gently pulled back, showing just the face. "Is it?"

"It's Father Kling." And then the question. "How did he die?"

Stephens, wiping the sweat from his forehead, suddenly pale and fumbling. "God, Father, I wish I didn't have to tell you this. I'd rather cut out my tongue than tell you this."

"How did he die?"

"He was murdered, Father." And then fast, the rest of it "He was with a woman named Stella Bates. They were both shot to death in the front seat of her car, in a lovers' lane down by the river. They—died in each other's arms, Father."

David Noone nodded and sat down. Outside, somewhere in the

night an automobile honked its mournful horn. Honked perhaps to signal the end of the world.

Above him, glaring against the glossy white of the ceiling, a single light bulb hung at the end of a tattered cord. He wondered if this was the room where they questioned the prisoners, wondered what time it was. Wondered how he would ever tell the bishop about Father Kling."

Detective Stephens came back with two cups of steaming coffee. "Talk if you want to," he said, "or just listen. I know it's been a terrible shock to you, Father."

"I keep wondering how I failed him. He was my responsibility with the monsignor away."

"You can't blame yourself for every sin in the world, Father."

"Who is there to blame?"

"The murderer."

"The murderer is each of us, Stephens. Each of us who makes this world what it is."

The detective sat smoking for a time in silence. Then he started to talk. "Father Kling was shot seven times in the back by a .45 caliber automatic. The range was close, and five of the bullets passed through his body and into the woman. They both died instantly. She was behind the wheel. He had both arms around her, with his back to the open side window where the killer stood. As near as we can tell, the shooting took place about ten o'clock. The place is pretty deserted, and nobody

heard it, or at least nobody reported it.

"But around two-thirty a couple of college kids were down there necking when suddenly the horn began to blow. We figure rigor mortis began to set in and Father Kling's arm hit the horn ring. The kids hadn't paid any attention to the car until then, but they went to see what was wrong and found the bodies."

"Seven times," Father Noone said, almost to himself.

"The killer emptied his gun into him. Must really have hated priests. We're checking a list of nuts now."

Father Noone sighed. "It could have been someone from the parish, of course. Someone who found out about George and this woman and decided to serve as God's avenger."

"Did you know this Stella Bates, Father?"

"Vaguely. She's in the parish, of course. I think I've noticed her at mass, but I don't remember ever speaking to her."

"Did you ever see Father Kling speaking to her?"

Had he? Hidden deep in his memory there was something . . . "I'm not sure. He was always out in front of church after mass, of course. Usually the young girls flocked around."

"Her driver's license lists Mrs. Bates' age as thirty-one."

"She was married," Father Noone said sadly. "Of course."

"To a butcher down at the Big Dollar Supermarket. Oscar Bates. He'll be here soon."

"I don't know him. I think she used to come alone to mass."

Why hadn't he known more? Why didn't he know every one of them? They were all his flock, his responsibility. Perhaps there should have been fewer of the nightly chess games and more calls around the parish.

Stephens went out, and returned presently with a large, dark-haired man in a state of obvious agitation. Oscar Bates must have been ten years older than his wife, and he looked more like a wrestler than a butcher. He sat on a chair opposite Father Noone, staring hard at the floor with tiny brown eyes that were too small for his massive head.

"I'm sorry to bother you with these questions at a time like this, Mr. Bates, but you must realize we have to get to the bottom of this business."

Bates wiped the back of one hairy hand across his mouth. "With a priest! Stella with a priest! No wonder she was always going to church!"

"You're not a Catholic?" Father Noone asked quietly.

"Me? No, not me! Stella was, but not me."

Stephens cleared his throat. "The car she was in, was that hers?"

Oscar Bates nodded. "I've got one of these little foreign jobs, but she wanted her own, so about six months ago I got her that second-hand one. Didn't know she'd be using it to sneak off with priests, though."

"What would you have done if you had known, Mr. Bates?"

"Huh?"

"Might you have killed them?" the detective asked.

"Oh, you're not goin' to pin this on me. I won't pretend it was a happy marriage, but I didn't kill her."

"Would you have if you'd known?"

Bates thought about it, rubbing the hand across his mouth again. "I probably would have killed the guy, not her. A matter of pride, you know."

Father Noone could listen to no more of it. He got up and went outside into the corridor. There was a stir now as the city began to come awake, a gathering of forces for the new day.

Soon he would have to call the bishop.

THE SESSION, at nine-thirty that morning in the bishop's quarters, was much as Father Noone had feared it would be. The old man sat unmoving in his chair while Father Noone spoke, interrupting only now and then with a pointed question.

"I have Detective Stephens' promise that the details will be kept out of the newspapers, your excellency."

The old eyes closed and then opened again. "Do you have the husband's promise, too?"

"Well—no, I don't."

The bishop was silent for a long time. Then he said, very quietly, "Go and pray for Father Kling's

soul. Pray for us all in this world, Father Noone."

David Noone left the bishop then, and went back to say a late morning mass at Saint Monica's. It was Saturday, and after some necessary conversation with Father Malloy about the funeral arrangements, he walked over to the school hall, where a few of the parish men were working at odd jobs.

"Ah, if it isn't Father Noone, bright and cheerful as the weather!" It was obvious that Pat O'Fern had not yet heard the news.

"Hello, Pat. How's the work going?"

"Fine, Father, fine."

The Irishman was busily sanding the top of a teacher's desk before applying a new coat of varnish. The man helping him was Arnold Tallow, another active member of the men's club.

"Morning, Father."

"Hello, Arnold. I haven't seen you at the last few meetings."

"I have been doing some night work, Father. Down at the gas station. With a wife and three kids you gotta keep plugging every minute."

"I know, Arnold, and I appreciate the time you fellows put in here."

Pat O'Fern chuckled. "I keep after him about the meetings, but Arnold's more of a worker than a talker, I guess."

Father Noone cleared his throat. Well, they'd have to know sooner or later. He might as well tell them now. "We had quite a tragic event

in the parish last night. It will be in the evening papers. Father Kling was murdered."

"Father Kling murdered?" O'Fern dropped his sandpaper and Arnold Tallow went white.

"It's a terrible thing. A woman—Mrs. Bates—was killed too."

"Murdered! But why?"

"The police aren't sure," Father Noone hedged. "I suppose it might have been an attempted robbery."

"That's awful," Tallow said. "I was just talking to him the other day."

"A terrible thing," O'Fern agreed. "What can we do, Father?"

"You might ask Father Malloy if he needs any help with the funeral arrangements. Pallbearers and the like. If you'll excuse me now—"

He left them standing there, the job forgotten, and went into the sunlit parking lot. Sister Xavier, the ancient nun who'd taught him in eighth grade and was now principal of Saint Monica's grammar school, was just entering the convent. He remembered that no one had told the sisters and hurried after her. It was one more disagreeable task, but there was no one to do it but himself.

Father Malloy had been a husky quarterback on Notre Dame's first team before deciding on the priesthood, and occasionally in the autumn he could still be seen in soiled sweatshirt and jeans, instructing the parish boys in the finer points of the game.

Spring was not his season, because baseball was not his game. His only

springtime sport was the nightly chess game with Father Noone, but this evening he made no attempt to bring out the board. Neither of them mentioned it.

"He seemed so sensible," Father Noone was saying. "So down to earth."

"He was a good man, a good priest. Nobody will ever make me believe differently."

"I know, Jimmy," Father Noone sighed. "But there are the facts to consider."

"What did the bishop say?"

"To pray for his soul."

Father Malloy was silent for a time. Then he went into the kitchen and returned with a bottle of beer. "What shall we tell the people at mass tomorrow? Does it call for a sermon?"

"Only a brief announcement about funeral arrangements, I think. Sister Xavier agrees that school should be dismissed Tuesday so the children can all attend the mass."

"What about the monsignor?"

Father Noone closed his eyes. "The bishop is notifying him. I just couldn't do it, Jimmy."

"Sure. I understand."

"Is Bertha still in the kitchen?" Noone hadn't seen the housekeeper since dinner.

"I think she's gone down to the funeral parlor. Father Kling was a special favorite of hers, you know."

"I know, I know."

"We should be going ourselves soon."



"Why don't you go ahead, Jimmy? I'll be along."

Father Malloy finished his beer and went to the closet for his top-coat. "I suppose some of them will smell it on my breath. Got any gum?"

Father Noone passed him a piece in silence.

"David!"

"Yes."

"Don't blame yourself for it."

"Who else is there to blame?"

"The killer, for one. That woman, for another."

The telephone rang and Father Noone stepped over to pick it up. "Saint Monica's rectory, good evening."

"Father Noone? This is Hazel Younger."

"Yes, Mrs. Younger."

"I just saw the terrible news in the paper."

"Yes. A tragedy."

"What was it, Father, what hap-

pened? What was he doing out there with that woman?"

"We don't know that, Mrs. Younger. The police are investigating."

"Well, I hope so. It could look bad, you know."

"Thank you for calling, Mrs. Younger. I'll see you at mass in the morning."

She mumbled something but Noone was already hanging up the phone.

Father Malloy stood by the door in his overcoat. "We'll get a lot of that, I suppose."

David Noone nodded. "Go on, Jimmy. I'll see you a bit later. I'm not up to facing them just yet."

When the other priest had gone and Father Noone was alone in the silent rectory, he climbed the stairs to the little attic room that had belonged to Father George Kling. It wasn't much of a room, but the rectory was overcrowded.

He'd resisted the finality of moving his own possessions into the monsignor's room, with the result that the large room stood empty while Father Kling had been consigned to the attic. It was a lonely room, brightened only by the silver crucifix above the bed and the picture of Father Kling's smiling mother on the dresser.

A lonely room, a lonely life. Could he be blamed for not resisting the companionship of Stella Bates? Father Noone pulled out a dresser drawer, half afraid that a

batch of compromising letters might reveal themselves.

There was nothing but the meager possessions of a priestly life. An extra pack of cigarettes, a few pennies, cuff links, a little album of family photographs. More pictures of his mother, and a few of a grammar school George with baby sister. None of the father who had deserted them, though. George Kling had mentioned that only once.

There was a book on the dresser, a paperbound edition of "Othello," with Shakespeare's moor rendered in abstract hues of brown and gold on its cover. Father Noone opened it at random and paused at a passage he'd never consciously noticed before. *To be once in doubt is once to be resolved.* Had Father Kling doubted? Had he doubted a faith that brought him to the priesthood? Or had it only been a woman's charms?

Standing there, David Noone read the line once more. Had it been Father Kling who doubted his God, or had it been David Noone who doubted Father Kling? He had been quick to accept the evidence, quick to believe the worst of a man about whom he knew only good. Had he been too quick to doubt?

He walked downstairs, pondering the problem, bothered by this new doubt which assailed him. Now it was time for him to join Father Maljoy at the funeral parlor, and yet he could not go. He could not face the overpowering odor of floral trib-

ute, the questioning expressions of mourning parishioners. Instead, he got out the car and drove across town to the supermarket where Oscar Bates worked.

It wasn't until he pulled into the nearly deserted acre of blacktopped parking lot that he realized Bates would not be on the job this night. He would be at his own funeral parlor somewhere, sitting in lonely vigil with the body of his wife.

Father Noone stopped for an evening paper at a nearby drug store. He passed quickly over the page one account of the killings, thankful only for its vagueness, and turned to the death notices and read:

Bates, Stella Ling. Suddenly, Friday, April 29. Survived by her husband, Oscar Bates. Friends may call Saturday evening, Sunday and Monday at Main Funeral Home. Services Tuesday morning at 9 A.M., Saint Monica's Church.

He pursed his lips together. An hour before the services for Father Kling. Jimmy Malloy must have scheduled it. Well, so what? They couldn't bar the woman from a Catholic burial, could they? He tossed the paper in the back seat of the car and headed downtown toward the Main Funeral Home.

There were few people in the red-draped parlor when he entered, and fewer flowers. Oscar Bates sat conversing with a man who might have been his brother, but when he spotted Father Noone he rose quickly and came forward.

"Good of you to come, Father. I didn't know if anybody would."

"Could we talk somewhere, Mr. Bates? In the other room, perhaps?"

He said a brief prayer over Stella Bates' body and then followed the man out.

"Good of you to come," Oscar Bates repeated. "She didn't have any family, you know."

"Had you been married long?"

"Three years, that's all. I didn't treat her right, I know it. I used to come home from the store and bang around the house acting miserable, hating my job and taking it out on her. You know what it is to be a butcher in a supermarket these days? All day long I cut up meat and wrap it in little plastic packages, and I slip the bad pieces underneath so the customers don't see them. You think I got pride in my work any more?"

"Sometimes life is difficult these days," Father Noone admitted. "Tell me something. Was Stella a local girl?"

"Who knows? She was a strange one, never talked much about her family. They were all dead, I guess."

"Did she ever mention Father Kling?"

"Not to me. I probably would have killed him if I knew. That detective thinks I did kill him."

"Well?"

"I wouldn't have killed her. I was unhappy, but I still loved her. I look at her now in her coffin and I still love her. But I don't cry. It's like

the supermarket. What good does crying do?"

"What good indeed? Thank you, Mr. Bates."

"I guess I wasn't much help, huh?"

"I really don't know what I'm looking for, at this point."

"Tomorrow I gotta go through her stuff. Get it outa the house. That's going to be the tough part."

"She never got letters from her family?"

"I told you, they were dead or something. Her mother died and her father ran off and she never had any brothers or sisters."

"A hard luck girl."

"Mighty hard luck. She's dead."

"Did she often go out alone at night, Mr. Bates?"

"Sometimes on Fridays, lately."

Father Noone nodded. Kling was often out on calls Friday. Still, that was no sort of evidence.

"I really must go now," he said. "Thank you again."

Oscar Bates nodded and walked slowly back into the mourning room, to be among the sparse flowers already beginning to open and die in the heat. Outside, the night seemed uncomfortably warm for the last day of April.

Father Noone stood for a moment inhaling the odors and sounds of the dark—the distant cries of playing children out too late, the scent of blossoms unseen in the night. It was too warm for April. Too warm, too soon.

He drove across town to the other funeral parlor, the other mourners. Here the room was filled with flowers, and crowded with the mumbled sorrows of familiar nuns and priests and parishioners. The bishop himself was there, surprisingly, holding court with Father Malloy in an outer room.

"We were beginning to wonder about you, Father," the bishop said by way of greeting.

"I stopped to see Stella Bates. She was a parishioner."

The bishop's eyebrows went up but he said nothing. Father Malloy spoke from the sidelines. "I scheduled her mass for Tuesday morning. There was nothing else I could do without causing more talk than there already is."

"You did the right thing," Father Noone said. "Pardon me now. I want to say a prayer for him."

He went back to the casket, waiting until Sister Xavier and another of the nuns had stepped aside. Then he knelt and said a brief, silent prayer over the composed, waxy face of Father George Kling.

As he was rising, Pat O'Fern caught his arm. "Terrible thing, terrible, Father."

"I'm glad you could come, Pat."

"It's a fine turnout for a great man. Why anyone would want to kill him—"

"Let us only pray that he has found a better life, Pat."

The Irishman looked steadily into his eyes. "Do you think he has, Fa-

ther? Do you really think he has?"

"We can only pray." Noone moved through the crowd, back to the bishop's side.

"It will be a big funeral, your excellency. The people loved him." Noone regretted the choice of words almost as soon as they were out of his mouth, but the bishop seemed not to notice.

The bishop surveyed the crowded room and said, "Perhaps he found himself at Saint Monica's. Both the good and the bad."

David Noone waited until Father Malloy moved out of earshot and then asked, "Was there ever any trouble before?"

The bishop looked startled. "What do you mean, Father?"

"With Father Kling. He came to Saint Monica's quite suddenly. I realize I shouldn't be asking, but I was wondering if you were forced to move him from his last parish."

"You're quite correct. You shouldn't be asking," the bishop replied. Then he relented a bit and said, "But you're all wrong, you know. It was actually Father Kling's wish that he come to Saint Monica's. He requested the transfer when it became obvious that the monsignor would not be able to resume his duties immediately."

"I never knew that," Father Noone said quietly.

"There was no reason for you to know it."

"Did he say why he wanted to come to Saint Monica's?"



"No. As you know, we rarely honor such requests for parish assignments, but in this case Father Kling seemed a good man for the post. Young, ambitious, a fine record."

"Yes," Father Noone murmured.

AFTER THE BISHOP departed, the crowd of mourners began to thin out. At five after nine, David Noone told Father Malloy he was going back to the rectory. They'd imported a couple of priests from the high school to hear confessions that evening, and he wanted to thank them before they got away.

But outside, in the brisk breeze of the April evening, he was distracted by a voice calling his name from a curbside automobile.

It was Detective Stephens, sitting in the darkened car with only the glow of his cigarette to mark his presence. "How are you, Father?"

"Hello, Stephens. Why didn't you come in?"

"Your job's in there. Mine's out here. Just watching the comings and goings."

"Any leads?"

"I've got a man on the husband, Bates. He seems the best bet right now. The husband is always the best bet in a case like this. He has no alibi. By the way, Father Kling's car is down at headquarters if you want to pick it up some time."

"No clues?"

The detective shook his head. "He pulled in, some distance from Mrs. Bates' car, and walked over to join her. The killer apparently arrived later in a third vehicle, saw them embracing, and killed them."

"He must have brought the gun with him."

"You'd be surprised how many people ride around with loaded pistols in their glove compartment."

Father Noone frowned. "But assuming he was alone, what was he doing alone in a lovers' lane?"

"A good point. He probably didn't just happen upon them. He probably followed Father Kling there. Maybe he'd seen them once before."

"It would take an awful lot of hate," David Noone said.

"Huh?"

"Hate. Hatred for priests and love of the church. But the two things don't go together, Stephens."

"They would in a madman's brain, Father. A religious fanatic of some sort."

"Who thought he could help the church by murdering a sinful priest?

I suppose it could be something like that."

"It's either that or Oscar Bates. There's no other choice."

"No chance of robbery."

"He wouldn't have shot while they were embracing if it was robbery." The detective's voice was sad. "I'm sorry I can't offer you any consolation, Father."

"I'm the one who offers consolation," David Noone replied. "Thank you, anyway. I'll see you later."

The detective nodded and lit another cigarette. Father Noone got in his car and drove back through the night to Saint Monica's.

Sunday was the first of May—May Day, Law Day, the feast of Saint Joseph the Workman. Many things to many people. It was properly sunny and reasonably warm, a good day for the month to begin, and the pews of Saint Monica's were crowded near capacity. They were all good people, Father Noone knew, but some of them were only good on Sunday mornings when the sun was shining.

He helped give out communion at the ten o'clock mass, and saw Arnold Tallow's wife and three children at the rail. After church, standing at his usual position by the side door, Father Noone saw Arnold himself coming out behind the family.

"Hello, Father. How did it go at the funeral parlor last night?"

"Crowded. He had a good many friends. Pat was there. And the bishop."

Arnold Tallow nodded. "I'll be there tonight. I just couldn't face it the first night."

Father Noone nodded to Mrs. Tallow and said some friendly words to the children. Then, as they moved away, he asked, "Arnold, will you and Pat be coming over this afternoon to count the collection?"

"Certainly, Father, if you want us to."

David Noone hated the feeling of business as usual, but the job had to be done. "Three o'clock. I'll help you so we can get through it fast. Father Malloy will probably be at the funeral parlor."

Of the scattering of parishioners still drifting out of church, Hazel Younger loomed large and unavoidable.

"A terrible tragedy, Father Noone," she gushed. "Do you know anything yet? Anything about that woman he was with?"

"The police are looking into it, Mrs. Younger. It's not for us to judge."

"But people are beginning to talk! I heard some women behind me on the way to church this morning . . ."

Father Noone turned away politely and spoke to a smiling woman he didn't know. When he turned back, Mrs. Younger had moved on with her thoughts.

After lunch, in the middle of an afternoon growing more pleasant with the passing hours, Pat O'Fern and Arnold Tallow arrived to count the collection money. It was a week-

ly ritual, made only slightly less so by the addition of a mechanized coin-counting machine and an envelope slitter. They tallied the coins, recorded the envelope contributions, went about the usual tasks. But the usual Sunday afternoon banter was missing, especially from the Irishman.

"It's a sad day," O'Fern said to Father Noone at one point. "The sun shouldn't be shining on a day like this."

"The sun should always be shining, Pat," Father Noone said, "to remind us that whatever happens here on earth, God's still in His heaven."

As he watched the two men total their figures, he thought back to the days of Father Kling, so recent in memory. He remembered the first Sunday Father Kling had said mass at Saint Monica's. Remembered, yes, Father Kling talking with Stella Bates outside of church that very first day!

It was the memory that had eluded him ever since the killing, the moment of time buried deep in his subconscious. He hardly knew Stella Bates, but he remembered that day. But why? What was there about their first meeting that stuck in his brain?

"Do you have the key to the school hall, Father?" Arnold Tallow asked. "We left some tools there yesterday."

Father Noone nodded. "I'll walk

over with you, Arnold. I need the exercise."

Tallow slipped on his jacket and called out to O'Fern. "We'll be back in a few minutes, Pat."

"Right. I'll guard the money. It looks like a good week, Father Noone."

"Always glad to hear that."

They left Pat O'Fern and started strolling across the tree-lined street that separated Saint Monica's Church from the sprawling parish school, a building of faded red brick with recent wings attached somewhat haphazardly to either side.

"What do you think about it?" Arnold Tallow asked him. "Who could have done it?"

"I just had a thought in there," Father Noone told him. "I was remembering Father Kling's first Sunday, and I remembered seeing him with Stella Bates for the first time."

"Oh?" Tallow was interested.

"I couldn't think for a moment what had made it stick so firmly in my memory, but now it just came to me. They knew each other, Arnold. They were talking as if they'd known each other all their lives!"

"I don't see—"

"You don't see what difference it makes? But it makes all the difference in the world! The pieces of this thing are falling into place!"

Across the street a car had stopped, and someone was waving at them.

"Who's that?" Arnold Tallow asked.

"Stephens, the detective," Father Noone said. "What . . . ?"

"Behind you, Father!" Stephens shouted, already tugging at something on his belt.

Father Noone turned quickly, and froze.

It was Oscar Bates, running fast not ten feet from them, closing the gap with a glistening steel meat cleaver held high above his head. He shouted one thing:

"Die, damn you!" and then he was on them.

The next seconds were a confusion of horror for Father Noone, still rooted to the spot.

Arnold Tallow flung himself at the assassin and took the full force of the butcher's cleaver in the side of the neck. As he fell away spurting blood, Oscar Bates raised his cleaver once more, catching the sun like some dagger in the hands of an Aztec priest.

Then Stephens fired twice from the middle of the street, and Bates toppled slowly over like a dead tree uprooted by the wind.

"He's killed his last priest," Stephens said, kneeling for a moment by the body.

But Father Noone was more interested in the living. He held his palm against Arnold Tallow's neck, trying futilely to stem the flow of blood. "He needs a hospital, fast!" he said.

"We'll get him there," Stephens said. "Whoever he is, he just saved your life, Father."

THE HOSPITAL WAS white with the odor of antiseptic, and depression. Father Noone stod alone with Stephens, knowing that any moment he must join Mrs. Tallow where she sat in numb comprehension with her children.

"I didn't have anyone to leave them with," she'd explained, and now they waited with her, no less uncomprehending.

"How did you get there so fast?" David Noone asked the detective.

"I told you we had a man on Bates. He came storming out of the house and my man called me. I thought he might be rushing for the rectory and I was trying to head him off. It's too bad I wasn't a minute sooner."

Father Noone nodded and turned toward Mrs. Tallow. One of the children was tugging-at her skirt and asking, "Where's Daddy?"

Just then a grim-faced doctor came down the corridor toward them and Father Noone turned to him instead. At times it was easier to face the dying than the living. "What are his chances, doctor?"

"I would say he needs a miracle. At the very least, he needs a priest."

Father Noone entered the room and moved toward the bed, waving the nurse aside. He bent close to the stricken man and said, "Can you hear me, Arnold? Can you speak?"

"I hear you." The voice was faint but steady.

"It's Father Noone, Arnold. I can hear your confession if you want to

make one."

The face moved ever so slightly, pale white against the pillow and sheets. Father Noone slipped the priestly stole around his neck and waited, but no words came.

Finally he bent forward again to whisper into the ear. "Arnold, you're dying. You didn't receive communion with your wife and children this morning. If you're in a state of mortal sin, you must confess it."

The voice whispered a reply. "I want to, Father. I want to, but I don't know how to say it."

Father Noone sighed, knowing what he must do. "Let me try to help you, Arnold. You haven't much time. You killed Father Kling and his sister, didn't you?"

The room was very quiet, and they might just then have been the only two people in the world. Priest and sinner, enacting an ageless ritual. Arnold Tallow opened his eyes and whispered, "How did you know? How did you know it all?"

Father Noone had fitted the pieces together while he paced the hospital corridor, and though there were still gaps in his reasoning, he knew that now was not the time to admit it. He must talk fast, and with certainty, because a man's soul might hang in the balance.

And so he began, whispering his message into the dying man's ear. "I remembered that Father Kling had known Stella the first time they met, and I learned from the bishop that he'd requested a transfer to

Saint Monica's. It wasn't too unreasonable to assume he'd requested the transfer to be near Stella Bates.

"But then I decided to believe in Father Kling, to go over the evidence from his point of view. Suppose, I asked myself, that Stella was not his lover. Suppose she was only someone he was trying to help."

Arnold Tallow's breathing was growing heavier, and Father Noone hurried on. "I remember that Father Kling had a sister, and that both Kling and Stella had spoken separately of a father who'd deserted them. Then, in Stella's death notice, I saw that her maiden name was listed as Ling. She'd simply dropped the K from it when she left home.

"I began to see the thing then. Father Kling was disturbed by a sister who'd married a non-Catholic. But then I had to back-track. She hadn't fallen away from the church. She still came every Sunday in spite of her husband. Besides, there was the matter of the murder. Oscar Bates, the likely suspect, would hardly have murdered Father Kling for talking to Stella if they were brother and sister. And yet, the very fact of that relationship all but ruled out the love scene in the car. Then I remembered one other thing—Father Kling had been searching the parking lot by the school just before he was killed, searching for a certain car.

"Whose? Stella's? Hardly, because it was a men's club meeting that was in progress. Stella's husband—Oscar

Bates? No, because he wasn't a Catholic and would have no reason to be there. Then I knew the truth. Father Kling was searching for another man's car. And another man meant he suspected his sister of committing adultery with a man in the parish. It would explain everything, including why he never told me Stella was his sister."

"You're right, of course," Arnold Tallow mumbled.

"Yes, Father Kling suspected, or knew, the worst. When he saw that car was missing, he must have known the man was meeting Stella at the lovers' lane again. He went there to confront them, but arrived before the man. While he was pleading with Stella in the front seat of her car, the man arrived. And killed them both rather than lose Stella."

"But why me?" Tallow asked.

"It had to be someone who usually attended the men's club meetings, but wasn't there on Friday. I remembered that you'd missed quite a few lately. That wasn't evidence, of course, until this afternoon. Oscar Bates wasn't trying to kill me. He was after you, Arnold. He'd told me he was going to sort out some of Stella's clothes today.

"He did, and found something—letters?—that told him the whole story. He said once he wouldn't have killed Stella but he would have killed the man. He must have been in a special fury because he realized you had killed Stella. Perhaps he didn't love her, but he had his pride."

"All right, Father—"

"Now you tell me about it, Arnold. Tell me you're sorry."

"Father Kling had talked her into leaving me finally. I couldn't stand that. I went back to the car for the gun, and said I was going to shoot her. The fool, he took her in his arms, hugging her to his chest so my only target was his back. I told him three times to let her go, but he wouldn't."

"She was his sister, Arnold. And a soul returning to God."

"I told him three times, and then I couldn't help myself. I fired into his back, emptied the gun through him, knowing it was my only way of reaching her. I wasn't even thinking about killing a priest. I didn't think about that, *really* think about it, until the next morning when you told us Father Kling was dead. Then, God help me, I realized what I'd done."

"Are you sorry, Arnold?"

There was a rasping in his throat, and Arnold Tallow did not answer.

"Arnold! Are you sorry?"

"I'm . . . sorry."

"For the murders? Both of them?"

"Yes—"

"For the adultery?"

"Yes—"

"Try to say an act of contrition, Arnold."

But even as Father Noone whispered the words of absolution, he saw that Arnold Tallow was dead.

Stephens was waiting for him in the hall outside, looking strangely troubled. "Father, I found some letters in Oscar Bates' pockets, Love letters."

Father Noone held up a hand. "Arnold Tallow just died, Stephens. The case is closed."

He passed the detective and moved down the hall to where Mrs. Tallow stood with the children.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "Your husband died a good man."

Later, on the afternoon of Father Kling's funeral, Pat O'Fern came back to the rectory with Father Noone. He slipped out of his coat and joined the priest in a cup of coffee.

"A terrible, terrible business, Father. These have been dark days."

"They have indeed, Pat."

"First Father Kling and that woman, and then poor Arnold."

"It's over now."

"But they're talking, Father. They're saying terrible things about poor Father Kling and that Stella Bates."

Father Noone closed his eyes and murmured a silent prayer for strength. *Forgive me, George. Forgive me, because the truth must be sealed in my heart forever.*

Then David Noone opened his eyes and said quietly, "We don't talk about it, Pat. We just don't talk about it."

DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES



It has been several decades now since "Little Ceasar" and "The Iron Man" exploded upon the reading public and rocketed W. R. Burnett to quick fame. Man of many trades — prize fighter, accountant, musician and actor — Burnett finally turned to his true love, writing, and carved himself a large niche of immortality. His stories always are off-the-beaten-track, completely original and bursting with sheer animal vigor. This, one of his early tales, shows the promise of the greatness that was to be his. From time to time in this magazine, you will see the DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES. When you do, read with care and discrimination. You will be reading a story which, whatever its field, whoever its author, has been revered and remembered as too good to be forgotten. "The Smiling People" is one of these. You'll remember it!

THE EDITORS

MURPH TOOK OFF his white coat, washed his hands, combed his hair, and then went back to the bar to wait on a customer while Whitey checked the money in the cash drawer. The customer was already drunk and a couple of steins of needle beer didn't sober him any. He leaned on the bar and stared at Murph.

"Listen, Irish," he said. "Ever hear of old Lefty Tod, used to be the knockout welterweight?"

"Sure," said Murph, glancing

back to see if Whitey was ready to take his place behind the bar.

"That's me," said the customer. "Never think it now, would you, and me with this belly? But I still got a kick in my left. Want to see?"

He aimed a left at Murph, who drew back wearily and said: "I believe you. I believe you."

The customer laughed and addressed the empty speakeasy: "He believes me. He believes me. Yellow

THE HUNTED

by W. R. BURNETT

Nothing mattered — his hopes, his woman, his future. For when a man knows a bullet is waiting for him around any corner, that man must walk alone with his fear. Unless he decides to do something about it . . .



bastard — afraid of an old guy's left!"

Murph picked up a glass and began to polish it.

"Yeah," said the customer, "young guy like him afraid of an old guy's left. Put up your hands and come out from behind that bar."

"Never mind," said Murph. "You better go on home and get some sleep."

"Get some sleep, hell!" said the customer. "Come out from behind that bar and I'll show you who ought to get some sleep."

"Aw, go on!" said Murph. "You're plastered."

"Sure I'm plastered. But that ain't no reason for you to insult the best little welterweight this man's town ever seen."

"Never mind," said Murph, glancing back at Whitey.

"Never mind, hell!" said the customer. "I mind, all right. I got a kick like a mule in this left and I'm gonna show you if you can insult the best little—"

"Aw, shut up," said Whitey, turning from the cash drawer, "or I'll throw you out on your neck."

"Who's talking to you?" the customer inquired. "I wasn't talking to you, was I? I was talking to this guy here."

"Shut up or beat it," said Whitey.

"Shut up yourself," said the customer. "I'd hand you a left as quick as I'd look at you."

Whitey put the money back in the cash drawer, walked around the end

of the bar, and took the customer by the lapels.

"You're gonna keep your mouth shut or beat it," he said, shaking him. "You bad guys make me sick."

"Let him alone, Whitey," said Murph. "He's plastered."

"I'm gonna bounce him out on his neck if he don't quiet down," said Whitey. "You're too damn easy on these guys."

The customer pulled away from Whitey suddenly and hit him with a feeble left. Whitey knocked him down with a straight right, then kicked him a couple of times. Murph ran out from behind the bar and picked the customer up, put his hat on, and guided him to the door.

"Throw him out on his neck," said Whitey, sucking one of his knuckles which was bleeding.

But Murph took the old pug to the door and started him down the street. Then he came back, put on his hat, and said:

"Cash drawer O.K.?"

"Yeah," said Whitey, "but you never collected from that bum that just went out."

"Hell," said Murph.

"It's O.K.," said Whitey. "But look here, Murph. You know you're getting to be too easy. You can't be that way around here. You got to be tough or they'll lay on you, see? You got to show 'em you're tough."

"All right," said Murph. "See you later."

Murphy went over to Mike's for his dinner; then he went up to his

room over Mike's, took off his coat and shoes, and lay down on the bed. But he couldn't go to sleep, as he kept thinking about old Lefty Tod and how Whitey had socked him and how the old guy had fallen like a ton of bricks.

Murph was too tender-hearted and he knew it. He had always been that way. When he was a kid in parochial school he was always trying to protect the little kids the school toughs picked on, and afterward, in the factory, Bull Dunnigan had given him a bad beating because he had stood up for a Polack that Dunnigan was bullying. It wasn't because he was yellow—he was strong and tough and a good rough-and-tumble fighter—but he just hated to see people get the worst of it.

Murph turned and tossed for a while; then he fell asleep. When he woke it was night; he saw a lighted elevated train standing at the station at the end of the street. He looked at his alarm clock. Back on the job in an hour. He washed and put on his coat and shoes, and went down to Mike's for a sandwich before going back to work. When he came in he noticed that Mike turned and whispered something to his wife, who pursed her lips and nodded.

But he saw The Duke sitting in the back of the restaurant and went back to sit with him, forgetting all about Mike and his wife.

The Duke had a napkin tucked into his collar and he was eating a big slice of watermelon, spitting the



seeds out into his plate and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. The Duke was nearly six feet tall and weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds. His face was round and red, his hair white. He was always smiling and everybody in the neighborhood knew him. He was an ex-soldier, ex-labor racketeer, ex-policeman, ex-saloon keeper, and ex-alderman. Now he did nothing and nobody knew how he lived.

"Well, my boy," he said as Murphy sat down across from him, "how's the beer business?"

"It's all right," said Murph.

"Having any trouble with the government dicks?"

"Not that I know of. I just work for Whitey, you know. On a salary, see?"

"Yeah?" said The Duke. "You'll never get to Congress that way. Never work for anybody, kid. No profit in that."

"Well," said Murph, "I got to eat. Money's scarce in this town."

Soon as I get a little stake I'm hitting for home."

"What part you from?"

"Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh."

"That's a nice town to be from," said The Duke.

"It's an up-and-up town," said Murph. "I wish I was back. Chi's too tough for me."

"Hell, it ain't tough," said The Duke. "This place is quiet, boy, quiet. I'm telling you straight."

A waiter took Murph's order and carried the remains of The Duke's melon to the kitchen. The Duke took out a cigar, lit it, and tipped back his chair.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Chicago's right quiet lately. Course once in a while some dummy gets up on his hind legs and goes gunning for somebody. But that don't disturb me none. What I say is live and let live; that is, unless some guy won't play that way. That's different."

"Most of 'em won't play that way," said Murph.

The Duke laughed, lowered the front legs of his chair, and pulled himself to his feet.

"Well, son, I'm on my way. Drop up and see me some night. I got gin and cigars. Be seventy my next birthday, and when a guy gets that old, why, he's apt to be lonesome. Old men are a damn' nuisance and most people won't put up with them. Now, ain't that right, son?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Murph.

"Good boy," said The Duke.

Murph turned to watch him as he

went up to the counter to pay his check. He walked slowly because of his bulk, but he swung his shoulders like a young man sure of himself. Mike leaned on the counter to talk to him. Murph saw The Duke glance in his direction at a word from Mike.

The waiter brought Murph his sandwich and he ate it hastily, wondering what Mike had said about him to The Duke. He left a dime tip for the waiter and went up to the counter to pay his check.

"Hello, Mike," he said, "How's things?"

"O.K.," Mike said, handing him his change. "How's things by you?"

"Fine," said Murph, turning to go.

"Say," said Mike. "Ever hear of Blower Tod?"

"No," said Murph. "Why?"

"I just wondered."

Murph turned and stared at Mike. Mike's wife nudged Mike and said:

"Tell the boy! Tell the boy!"

"Say," said Murph. "What's wrong?"

"Well," said Mike, "Blower Tod's gunning for you, kid. That's all."

"Gunning for me?" said Murph. "Hell, I never heard of him. You got your dates mixed."

"No," said Mike's wife, "we got it straight from Blower himself."

"Yeah," said Mike. "He says you bounced his old man out of Whitley's and broke his nose. You're in a tough spot, kid, 'cause Blower's bad."

Murph looked at the floor and said nothing.

"Blower's running booze for Terry O'Sullivan and he knows he can get away with anything. Better pull out, kid, while you're all together."

Murph ran his hands over his face, stared at the floor for a moment, then said: "Much obliged for the tip."

WHITEY ASKED, "Murph, what's the matter with you lately? You got something on your mind?"

"It's the weather," said Murph, avoiding Whitey's eyes. "I never seen such hot weather."

"Yeah," said Whitey, "it's hot all right. But that ain't it. You're in some kind of trouble, Murph. Why don't you let me in on it?"

"You're kidding yourself, Whitey," said Murph. Then, as Whitey said nothing, Murph asked: "Cash drawer O.K.?"

"Yeah," said Whitey.

Murph took off his white coat, put on his street coat, took his hat from the hook, and started out.

"Murph," called Whitey, "you needing money?"

"No," said Murph.

Whitey looked at him for a moment, then he went back behind the bar.

"So long, Whitey," said Murph; "see you later."

"So long."

Before leaving Whitey's Murph looked up and down the street. No one in sight except a couple of Ital-

ians swinging picks. He started for his room, but he hadn't gone ten steps when sweat began to stand out all over him and he wanted to break into a run.

A man didn't have a chance even in broad daylight when somebody was gunning for him. Every doorway was a potential hiding place for a killer. Before he reached his room, an automobile turned a corner near him suddenly and threw him into a panic. He leaped into a cigar store. The clerk looked up at him in surprise. Murph's face was pale and twitching.

"Camels," he said.

"Two for a quarter?" asked the clerk.

"No, just one."

The clerk handed him the cigarettes and a book of matches. Murphy lit a cigarette and stood leaning on the counter. His mouth was dry and his heart was beating so loudly he was afraid the clerk could hear it.

"Nice game yesterday," said the clerk.

"Yeah," said Murph.

"Cubs got a good team this year. Ought to get some action," said the clerk.

"Yeah," said Murph. Then suddenly he turned, nodded to the clerk, and walked out of the store.

"Jeez," said the clerk, "that guy's hopped to the ears."

Murph didn't feel like eating, so he went up to his room, took off his coat and shoes, and lay down on the bed. But he couldn't get settled, and

twice he got up to see if he had locked the door. He couldn't get Blower Tod out of his mind. Even when he was working, even when the evening customers were keeping him constantly on the go, part of his mind was thinking about Blower Tod and his big automatic.

Now, how come all this had to happen to him? He was a right guy, had never caused anybody any trouble, and always tended to his own business. One day he was getting along all right, drawing pretty good money, and not a worry on his mind. The next day the whole thing was upset. He was losing weight; he didn't have any appetite; and he was so nervous he couldn't sleep like he used to, but turned and twisted all night long and had nightmares. If he could only get the whole thing over with.

Some day he'd meet Blower on the street and say to him: "Now look here, Tod, you got me wrong. I never done nothing to your old man. I never done nothing to nobody."

Only thing was, Tod'd know somebody done something to his old man and that's where Whitey came in. He couldn't put Whitey in no spot like that, 'cause Whitey had picked him off the street and give him a good job. Course he could always beat it, but he was sick of the rods and wanted to keep on earning money and staying out of jail.

He remembered one night over on Halsted Street. It was hot and

everybody was out walking around. He stopped at a penny arcade to kill a little time. He looked at some of the smutty pictures in the penny machines, tested his strength on a punching bag, tried his grip, got perfume squirted on his coat, and got his fortune told. Then he strolled back to the shooting gallery at the rear of the place. A half-dozen men were grouped around a big tow-haired man who was shooting at the revolving target and hitting it every time. It was fifteen shots for a quarter and the big guy made every shot count, ringing the bull's-eye fifteen times.

When he put down the gun, one of the group slapped him on the back and said: "Atta boy, Blower!" It was Blower Tod.

Murph sat up in bed and cried: "I can't stand it! I can't stand it! It's getting me. I'm going nuts."

He got up and dressed. Then he took a pint bottle of liquor from a cupboard and drank it in three gulps.

FOURTH OF JULY night Murph got off work at ten o'clock. It had been a tough day. He had worked steadily since nine in the morning, and the joint had done a capacity business. All day long crackers had been exploding in Whitey's. Torpedoes had been flung at the bar and even at the mirror behind it. One guy had got a bad burn by holding on to a big cracker too long, but he had laughed, tied a handkerchief

around his hand, and gone on drinking.

Well, it was all right for other people, but not for Murph. Every time a cracker or a torpedo exploded, he shook all over, and several times he felt himself to see if he had been hit.

All along the street kids were shooting off Roman candles and rockets, and a bunch of hoodlums were on one corner throwing torpedoes at the passing automobiles. Murph hurried along toward his room, keeping close to the store fronts. When he got to his room, he sat down in a chair by the window, put his hands to his face, and began to cry. He couldn't help it; his nerves were shot.

Pretty soon he got up, took a pint from the cupboard, and drank it. Then he began to undress, but somebody knocked at the door. His first impulse was to dive under the bed, but he stifled it and stood in the middle of the room, trembling. The knocking continued. Finally he called:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Murph. It's Mary."

Mary was a waitress he had spent a couple of nights with. She lived across the hall, worked twelve hours a day in a sandwich shop, and picked up what she could in the neighborhood. He ran over to unlock the door, sighing with relief.

"Gee," said Mary when he opened the door, "what you got your lights out for? Going to bed?"



She put her arm around him. He put his arms around her and kissed her.

"Jeez, I'm glad to see you," said Murph. "Suppose we have a party?"

"O.K.," said Mary. "How come

you been dodging me lately, Murph?"

"I ain't."

"Yes, you have," said Mary. "You been going right past me and not seeing me."

"Honest to God, Mary," said Murph, "I didn't know it."

"Well, anyway," said Mary, "let's go up on the roof and see the fireworks."

They went up on the roof. It was a nice night, with a cool breeze now that the sun had gone down, and a sky full of stars. Some of the other people that lived in the building were up on the roof, and one man had even brought up some chairs for his wife and kids. They leaned on the parapet, put their arms around each other, and watched the fireworks. In all directions red and green flares were burning, rockets and Roman candles were going up, and crackers popping. There was a smell of burned powder in the air.

"This sure is a safe and sane Fourth all right," said Mary, laughing.

But Murphy was thinking about Blower Tod and said nothing.

After a while they got tired of watching the fireworks and decided to go down and get some sandwiches and coffee at Mike's. Mary walked with her arm around Murph and kept talking to him, but he said nothing.

"Say," she said finally. "What's wrong with you, anyway? You're

about as sociable as a strange police dog."

"I'm just thinking," said Murph.

"Lined up a new sweet mama?"

"I should say not."

"Don't kid me. I know."

"I was just thinking, that's all."

"Your new mama must be out of town," said Mary, hugging him.

They went into Mike's and got a table near the front. The place was full and in the back some drunks were firing off torpedoes. Mike walked around, pale and determined, balancing a tray.

"It's been a hard day for everybody," said Mary, jerking her head at Mike. "Down where I work they like to run me ragged."

"Me, too," said Murph.

They ate their sandwiches and drank their coffee in silence. When they went up to the front counter to pay the check, Mike's wife leaned over and whispered to Murph:

"That friend of yours was in here tonight."

"Yeah?" said Murph, swallowing and trying to grin.

"Yeah," said Mike's wife, "and he was so boiled he could hardly stand up."

"That so?" said Murph.

Murph and Mary left the restaurant and Murph started for the doorway next to the restaurant which led up to his room, but Mary pulled him the other way.

"Let's take a walk," she said.

"No," said Murph, "let's hit the hay."

"No," said Mary, "I want to take a walk first."

"Well," said Murph, "if you got to take a walk, we'll take one."

They turned into a side street and started to walk toward the lake. In front of an old stone house with a long flight of stone steps leading up to it, a group of kids were setting off firecrackers. Murph and Mary walked around them and went on. Suddenly Murph bent over and slapped his leg; something had stung him. Just as he bent over, he heard a low whine and something struck a stone step in front of him and ricocheted, knocking off his hat. Mary stood looking down at him with her mouth open.

"Somebody's shooting! Somebody's shooting!" she screamed.

Murph, stunned, unable to run, straightened up and looked across the street. In front of a pool room three men were struggling with a big tow-headed man, whose hat was off and who was swearing at the top of his voice. It was Blower.

"Let's beat it," said Murph. "That guy must be crazy."

He took Mary by the hand and they ran down an alley, doubled back, and went up to his room. She turned on the lights and made Murph lie down on the bed. Then she pulled up his right pants leg. The bullet, cutting across in front of him, had made a long, narrow hole in his trousers. He was bleeding slightly.

"Only a little scratch," said Mary. "'Tain't nothing."

She ran across to her room for iodine, and Murph lay staring at the ceiling, grinding his teeth.

IT WAS ABOUT twelve o'clock one night when Murph knocked at The Duke's door. The Duke lived in a little flat over a drug store, and it was said that he had never locked a door in his life.

"Come in," called The Duke, and Murph opened the door. He stood hesitating on the threshold. The Duke was sitting in front of a window with his shirt turned in and a big white handkerchief in his hand. There was a fifth of gin and a half-dozen lemons on the table beside him.

"Well, well," said The Duke. "Come in and pull up a chair, son. Ever drink gin? I drink it 'stid of water. It makes me fat."

Murph stood turning his hat in his hands.

"I want to see you about a little matter," he said.

"O.K.," said The Duke. "If you're in a jam remember this: I'm short on money, but long on advice. Sit down."

Murph sat down and tried to smile. He refused The Duke's offer and sat watching The Duke while he sucked a lemon, then took a swallow of gin.

"It's my own system," said The Duke. "Lemon and gin. The lemon kills the taste of the gin and the gin

kills the taste of the lemon. Perfect."

Murph tried to laugh, but his hands were trembling and he had a pulling sensation in his stomach. The Duke narrowed his eyes and stared at Murph.

"What's the matter, kid?" he said. "Been using the white stuff?"

"No," said Murph, "but I'm all shot just the same. I wouldn't tell nobody but you. There's a guy gunning for me and it's getting my goat."

The Duke ran his hands down his face and began to twirl his mustache.

"Is this guy gunning for you for sure, or is he just shooting off his mouth?"

"He's gunning," said Murph. "He damn' near got me the Fourth."

He pulled up his pants leg and showed The Duke the sticking plaster on his leg.

"Uh huh," said The Duke.

Murph's shoulders began to shake and a look of acute misery crossed his face.

"I can't stand it, Duke!" he cried. "I can't stand it no longer. I'm going nuts, Duke. I can't sleep nor I can't eat. I wish to God he'd got me."

"Hell!" said The Duke. "You're a pretty likely-looking kid, Murph. You got a yellow streak?"

Murph looked up suddenly at The Duke.

"Who the hell says I have?"

"I'm asking you, kid. I'm asking you," said The Duke, taking another

suck at a lemon, followed by a drink of gin.

"It's this way," said Murph. "Some guy's sore 'cause he said I chucked his old man out in the street and busted his nose. See? But it wasn't me. Whitey socked the guy 'cause he got fresh, and all I did was help him get started home. Honest to God, I was gentle with him, see, 'cause I felt sorry for him. But I can't put Whitey in no spot like that."

The Duke nodded and went on pulling at his mustache.

"You see," said Murph, "I comes in on the rods, and was I broke! I didn't have a thin dime. Whitey takes me right off the street and gives me a good job, so there you are. I'm not putting Whitey in no bad spot."

"Good," said The Duke.

"But here's the thing," Murph went on. "I'm all shot, and I ain't doing Whitey a bit of good the way I am—forgetting orders and getting the money balled'up. But he thinks I'm sick, see, or in some kind of jam, and he don't say nothing."

"Whitey's a right guy," said The Duke.

"You said it."

"Well," said The Duke, "if you're dead scared of getting bumped, why don't you blow?"

"Where to? Summer ain't gonna last forever. When winter comes on I want a place to stay and a job. I ain't a regular 'bo. I just work at it in the summer sometimes. I ain't



been saving my money. You know how that is. And I ain't gonna blow into Pittsburgh without no job and nor no money. I'm stuck, that's all."

"I got you," said The Duke.

"You see," said Murph, "this is soft money for me. I've put up tents with a circus and swung a sledge in a foundry and cut timber and stacked wheat, and this is soft money, see? I hate to get run out of a snap like this 'cause some dummy starts to rare!"

"I heard something about all this," said The Duke. "Who's the guy?"

"Blower Tod."

"Lefty Tod's kid, huh?"

The Duke lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Well," he said, "if he ain't got any more guts than his old man, you got a cinch."

"He burned me once," said Murph.

"Yeah," said The Duke, "but he don't figure you'll burn him back."

Murph stared at The Duke, but said nothing.

"Yeah," said The Duke, "he's got

everything on his side. He does the hunting and you do the dodging. It's funny what a big difference it makes to a guy which side of the fence he's on. Blower's got all the brass in the world now 'cause he's on the right end of the gun. Put him on the wrong end and see how long it lasts. I know that family. I seen his old man lay down like a dog 'cause a little Italian boy hit him half a dozen body blows."

Murph sat staring at The Duke; the color had already begun to come back into his face.

"If you're dead set on sticking it out," said The Duke, "listen: get yourself a gat and put some lead in it. Pack it and let people know it. Tell everybody you meet that you're gunning for Blower Tod and you're gonna blow him into Indiana. Get the idea? In twenty-four hours you'll be so tough you'll be scared of yourself. And if I know my Tods, in a day or so Blower'll forget all about gunning for you or anybody else. He'll be too busy running."

"It's an idea," said Murph. "Course I wouldn't really bump the guy, but its an idea."

The Duke pulled himself to his feet, opened a bureau drawer, and took out a big blue-steel revolver and a shoulder holster.

"Here you are, kid," he said. "The Duke's gonna give you a lift 'cause you're a right guy. Strap this cannon on, then see how different you feel."

Murph held the weapon in his hands for a few minutes, staring at

it, then he took off his coat, strapped on the holster, pulled it down under his left armpit, and put the gun in it. He stood in the middle of the room grinning at The Duke. The gun felt heavy, but it felt good.

"Now," said The Duke, "remember this: plans don't always work out. I'm just trying to do the best I can for you. But if you get yourself shot up, don't blame me. I'll send flowers, but that's all."

Murph felt better already. He even found himself thinking about taking Mary down to Oak Street beach some night. His death didn't seem so certain now; there was a doubt about it.

"Another thing," said The Duke. "I'll fix your bull for you. O'Shay's a right guy and he ain't got no use for Blower Tod, Terry O'Sullivan or no Terry. So put it on big."

"O.K.," said Murph.

Then he took a pint of gin from his pocket.

"Here's a little present for you," he said.

The Duke took the pint, uncorked it, and ran it under his nose a few times.

"Well," he said, "I guess it's no worse than mine. Thanks."

Before going home, Murph stopped in a pool room to buy some cigarettes. On the front table four of the Five Corners gang were shooting pay ball. Murph lit a cigarette, pushed open his coat, and stood watching them with hands on his hips. Red Sweeney was the first to

notice him; he saw the strap of the shoulder holster and the determined look on Murph's face.

"Say," said Murph. "Any you guys know where Blower Tod is?"

Sweeney rubbed one hand over his face; the others looked up. The one who had been shooting stood with his cue poised.

"No," said Sweeney.

"Well," said Murph, "when you see him, tell him I'm looking for him."

"He's looking for you," said Sweeney.

"Well, tell him he knows where I work. I'm there every day. Tell him I'm damn' anxious to see him."

"O.K.," said Sweeney.

Murph stood and watched the game for a moment, then he went out. As soon as he was gone, Sweeney walked over and put a nickel in the pay phone.

When Murph passed Mike's window, he saw Mike standing at the counter in the front, so he went in.

"Hello," said Mike.

"Hello," said Murph. "Ain't seen that bastard of a Blower around here, have you?"

Mike's mouth fell open and he just stood there.

"If you do," Murph went on "tell him I'm looking for him."

He pulled back his coat and stood leaning on the counter. Mike saw the holster strap and grinned.

"Can't scare you, can they, kid?"

"Not a chance," said Murph. "Just tell anybody that asks you

that Blower Tod's number is up."

When he was climbing the stairs to his room, he began to have qualms. This was all pumped-up stuff. Blower would laugh at him and bump him off. He'd be sorer than ever now, and he wouldn't let anything stand in his way. Murph began to shake all over and he hurried to his room, double locked the door, and crawled under the sheets, fully dressed. Suddenly he sat up.

"I ain't yellow! I ain't yellow! If he fools around with me, I'll fill him full of holes."

MURPH SAID, "Whitey, I was figuring I'd kind of like to take my girl down to Muny Pier for some dancing. I was just wondering . . . "

Whitey nodded.

"Sure," he said. "Mut and I'll worry along."

Murph took off his bar coat, washed himself, carefully combed his hair, then he reached under the bar, got his holster, and strapped it on.

"One of these days you're gonna hurt yourself with that cannon," said Whitey. "Fool around with guns long enough and you'll get burnt. Just like women."

Murph laughed.

"I ain't fooling," said Whitey. "I been in this racket for five years and I never yet seen a guy that packs a rod that hasn't got himself in a jam just on account of it. You better put that heater away."

"Not until," said Murph.

"Hell," said Whitey, "that's all over with. I ain't seen hide nor hair of Blower nor his old man since the Fourth."

Murph took a note out of his pocket and handed it to Whitey, who read it and whistled.

"Trying to scare you out, huh? Say, why don't you tip O'Shay off and let him have a talk with this big bum? O'Shay don't like that Five Corners mob much, anyway."

"I'll do my own fighting," said Murph.

"Uh huh," said Whitey, "and you'll do your own dying. Yeah. How comes these dumb eggs has always got to be popping at each other? What the hell! Ain't there business enough and room enough for everybody? Look at Buggsy. Now there wasn't no use in him getting himself shot up like that. That one arm of his'n won't never be no good."

Murph winced slightly and looked at the floor.

"Yeah," Whitey went on, "I been in this racket five years and I never seen the day I'd pack a rod. That's all bunk."

"You let me alone, Whitey," said Murph. "I'm running this show. Anyway, wasn't you the guy that told me I ought to get tough? Well?"

"All right," said Whitey. "But getting tough and packing a rod are two different things."

"Never mind," said Murph.

He took his straw hat from the hook and started for the door.

"Yeah," called Whitey, "and it was me that done the busting, anyway. How come they don't come popping at me? I told Red Sweeney but he just laughed."

"I know," said Murph. "He thought you was trying to give me some protection. You keep out of this, Whitey."

"Well," said Whitey, "all I got to say is, you're a square shooter, kid; and you got a lifetime job if you live that long."

"So long, Whitey," said Murph.

"So long."

Murphy went over to Mike's to wait for Mary. Mike was out, but Alonso, the counterman, nodded and smiled when Murph came in. Because of the feud Murph had become known all over the neighborhood. Blower Tod's friends had been telling everybody that Murph's number was up; and Murph's friends had been telling everybody the same about Blower. The neighborhood watched the feud with detachment. It was neither sympathetic nor appalled, merely curious. There had even been some bets made on the outcome, with Murph on the short end.

"Seen Mary?" asked Murph.

"Yeah," said Alonso; "she went upstairs for a minute. Said she'd be right down."

"O.K.," said Murph. "Give me a cup of Java."

Alonso drew the coffee, then stood with his elbows on the counter and watched Murph drink it.

"Murph," he said, "they tell me Blower got through with an empty truck yesterday. Got hijacked. Terry O'Sullivan's raving. That's what Red Sweeney says, anyway. Sore at Blower and Blower's sore at Terry and everybody else. So there you are. It's a tip."

"Nobody's seen Blower lately," said Murph. "He must be hiding."

Alonso laughed.

"Think so? Me, I don't know. Blower's a busy guy."

Murph raised his eyes to Alonso's face, ready to make some retort, but Alonso's expression warned him that something was wrong. He lowered his coffee cup slowly and turned to look in the direction Alonso was looking. Blower Tod was standing on the threshold, Beefy face, big shoulders, derby hat, and all. Murph took a backward step, dropped his cup, which smashed on the tile floor, and drew his gun. But Blower ducked, put his arm over his face, and ran.

Murph, shaking all over, stood with his gun in his hand for a long time. Then he put it away and turned to look at Alonso. But Alonso had disappeared. He was lying on the floor behind the counter.

"Jees," said Murph, "he beat it!" Alonso got shakily to his feet.

"He beat it," Murph reiterated.

"Well, can you tie that?" said Alonso, dropping his hands on the counter. "That big bum must be yellow."

Murph laughed. Hell, he couldn't

see what he had been worrying about all this time. Why, this Tod was a four-flusher just like The Duke said. No more worrying for Murph. No more hugging the wall, no more watching his shadow on the window blind, no more sleepless nights and feverish days, no more packing a heavy gun and being tough and blowing off his mouth.

Murph began to whistle.

"But maybe he wasn't packing a rod," said Alonso.

Murph stopped whistling to stare at Alonso.

"He always packs a rod," he shouted. "What the hell are you talking about?"

He wanted to take a paste at Alonso, standing safe there behind the counter and thinking up things to destroy his newly recovered peace of mind. Alonso took a step backward and stared at Murph, whose face was contorted.

"Sure," said Alonso, "that's right."

"Sure it's right," said Murph.

Mary came in the front door in a pink summer dress, which was sleeveless and didn't quite reach her knees.

"Here's me, Murph," she said, "all set for Muny Pier."

"Hello, Mary," said Murph. "I just had a run-in with our old friend Blower Tod."

"Yeah?" said Mary, her eyes big. "What happened?"

"He dogged it," said Alonso. "I mean Blower."

"Wow!" said Mary. "Some class to my Murph."

They took the elevated and got off at Grand Avenue and took a street car. The street car was full and Murph spent most of his time trying to keep Mary from falling. As they got off the car at the end of the line a man jostled Murph heavily. It was Big Joe, one of the Five Corners mob.

"Blower ain't through with you," said Joe. "You caught him with an empty rod."

Murph laughed. "That's his story."

"Yeah?" said Joe.

"Beat it, you big bum," said Mary.

Joe stared at them, then disappeared into the crowd.

Murph's evening was spoiled. He bought tickets and they danced and Mary was cute as she could be and kept telling him what a great guy he was, but it was no use. Every time a shoulder touched him, he whirled abruptly; every time anybody came up behind him he shied off and put his hand inside his coat. Of course you wouldn't expect a guy to take a shot at you in a place like this, but you never know!

About twelve o'clock they started home. On the elevated Murph sat looking at his shoes and Mary couldn't rouse him. Murph was full of despair. For weeks he had been living at a tension, keyed up to a meeting with Blower Tod.

Now that the meeting had come and nothing decisive had happened,

he felt like a deflated balloon. He just couldn't keep it up any longer. He felt a sudden distaste for The Duke, big and fat, sitting safely in his room and laughing, while some kid he hardly knew was packing his own rod and getting ready for the cemetery. The Duke was wrong. Murph was sure of it. Why, Blower was a tough, a real tough guy.

"Here we are," said Mary, shaking him.

"Huh?" said Murph.

He followed Mary out into the elevated station and down the stairs. Mary took his arm.

"Don't let it get your goat, kid," she said.

"I'm O.K.," said Murph.

As they crossed the street in front of Mike's they saw two men in the doorway which led up to their rooms.

"Look," said Mary.

"I see," said Murph, who had begun to shake. "Here it comes, kid. You beat it. Run in Mike's."

He wanted to lie down on the sidewalk and pretend he had been suddenly stricken. He wanted to go over and beg Blower's pardon and tell him it was all a mistake. He wanted to run blindly in the opposite direction and yell for help. But he did none of these things. He put his hand inside his coat and walked toward the two men. Mary stood in the middle of the street for a moment, then she made a dash for Mike's, with her hands over her ears.

The two men stepped out into the light cast by Mike's windows and

raised their hands. It was Blower and his old man. Ten paces away from them Murph stopped and stood staring at them, fearing a trap.

"Well?" he said.

"Get your hand off that rod," said Blower. "We're here on the square."

"What's the idea?" said Murph.

"Looke here, Mr. Murphy," said Old Tod, "what you gunning for my boy for?"

"He's gunning for me," said Murph.

"Hell, no!" said Old Tod. "He was just fooling."

Murph laughed.

"I guess he burnt me on the Fourth, didn't he?"

Blower shifted his feet and lowered his head.

"They put me up to it," he said. "I wasn't figuring to hit you."

Mike, Alonso, Mary, and Mrs. Mike all came out of the restaurant and stood looking at the Tod's.

"Well," said Murph, swelling out his chest and keeping his hand on his gun, "what you guys got on your minds?"

"Here's how it is," said Old Tod. "You boys just forget all your troubles and shake hands. That's what I say. No use for two upstanding boys like you to be running around popping at each other. I guess I ought to had my nose busted, shooting off my mouth like I was."

"Sure," said Blower, "I'd've busted it myself."

Murph took his hand out of his

coat and the Tods hesitated, then lowered their hands.

"Well," said Murph, "if you guys 're on the square it's all right with me."

Blower stepped up quickly to shake hands and the old man followed suit. Blower was grinning and Murph saw that when he grinned he looked just like a big overgrown kid. Murph couldn't understand how he could have been so scared of Blower Tod. Why, he could lick him in a fight without half trying.

"Did you kiss and make up?" called Mary.

"Yeah," said Blower, grinning. "Ain't neither of us ready for slow music yet."

An hour later Murph lay on the bed singing as loudly as he could and beating out the time on the wall with his feet, while Mary made some coffee on her little oil stove.

"Say, Irishman," she said, "will you pipe down! There's a guy sleeps next door that's crabby as the devil and he'll be raring in a minute."

"Let him rare," said Murph. "Ain't I got a right to celebrate?"

"You already celebrated," said Mary, laughing, "and how!"

Next Month

Another DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES Masterpiece

NIGHTMARE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

One of the greatest of all crime writers comes to us in next month's issue of this magazine, Cornell Woolrich, master of crime action fiction, author of "Phantom Alibi." His tales of midnight terror are unsurpassed. Here is a tale of a man who woke up after a tortured sleep to find that his dream had become dreadful reality. For sometime during that night of horror he had met a lovely lady — and had sent her to her death. Don't miss this powerful story!

A NOVELET OF STRANGE DARK TERROR.



COLOR HER DEAD

*She had many pals, no morals, no chance.
Guess if you dare, the secret of the painted
lady — and how she lived and died.*

by LEO P. KELLEY



SHE LAY ON the lumpy roll-away bed in the dingy loft and she did not mind that Christopher Montserrat stood in the doorway staring at her and whispering her name over and over and finally shouting it.

"Crystal!"

She did not mind the noise of his shout or the feasting of his eyes over her nude body — because she was dead.

Though death had stilled the soft thunder of her heart, it had not damaged her artificial beauty. Following her hairline, painted diamonds erupted redly, bluely. Beneath them and running down the length of her nose

were whorls of color like insane rivers. Her lips were silvered; her ears were bronzed. Her body was a chorus of color, singing with green and chrome orange voices. Bass notes of purple muttered on her kneecaps and from her shoulders yellow falsettos trilled.

When she did not answer, because she could not, Christopher went to where she lay and touched her arm and then her cheek. Cold. He had known it. He had known it when he had first come into the room. The way she had just lain there and not awakened! She had been sick for some time with vague complaints.

Nausea. Weakness. Stiffness in her wrist and ankle joints.

Christopher started to pull the sheet over her head the way he had seen it done in James Bond movies. But her navel captured his attention. The psychedelic flower, of which her navel was the seed pod, was wrong. The paint had blurred and the leaping petals looked more like flames.

He had not painted that part. Who had? He had quite forgotten. He was tempted to remedy the faulty rendering when he remembered that it didn't matter any more. Because his exhibit—because Crystal was dead. Instead of displaying his work of art, he would have to bury it—her. He drew the sheet over the lifeless body.

He started. Where had the sudden sound come from? He looked around nervously. Slowly, he moved toward the open door of the kitchen and stepped inside.

Like a beached whale, the figure was rising from the tub that was usually discreetly covered by a large plywood panel on which meals were eaten sans tablecloth.

"Grip!" Christopher exclaimed.

The whale in the tub grunted and brushed away the hair that kept falling over his face. The bells he wore on a silver chain around his neck tinged plaintively as he struggled up and out of the tub.

"I'm going," Grip announced.

Christopher helped him out of the tub. "Crystal is dead," he said.

"Why?"

Christopher didn't know what to say. So he repeated, "Crystal is dead." He added, "See for yourself." He pointed into the loft's main room where the body lay.

Grip went to the door and peered into the room. He went and lifted the sheet and let it fall. His bells fell silent as he stared down at the lumpy whiteness.

"What are we going to do?" Christopher asked, coming to stand beside him.

"Get you another exhibit. The East Village is full of kids who want to become famous."

"No, no, no!" Christopher cried. "I mean about the body!" Poor Crystal, he thought. It's the way she always thought of herself. As a body. That's why she loved being painted by assorted artists and even by obvious pretenders to the throne of art. That's why she had become the star attraction of Christopher Montserrat's seedy studio in which he presented what he billed as "*Instant Art—The Kin-Esthetic Experience.*"

"You got choices," Grip commented, scratching himself vigorously beneath his silk blouse. "You can get an undertaker, a doctor or the fuzz. Or any combination of the three—doctor-fuzz, fuzz-undertaker—"

"Oohhh!"

"You think she died or got killed?" Grip asked.

"Killed?" Christopher bleated. "How could she have been killed? By whom? Why? She was sick. You

knew that. We all did. I told her to see a doctor. I told her!"

"Takes bread." Grip's hair bounced on his broad shoulders as he shook his head and his bells shattered the silence.

"I gave her some. I paid her well."

"Call your brother."

Christopher's eyes went wide. "Carl? No!"

"Yes," said Grip, picking up an orange from the window sill and beginning to peel it. "He'll know what to do. He knows about things—about forms and telephone numbers. The whole establishment scene."

It was true, Christopher had to admit. Carl knew about all sorts of things that mystified and intimidated Christopher. But then Carl was older. In a few months he would be forty!

Christopher had been a late bloomer; he was only twenty-nine.

Carl was the one who could explain Social Security and how to buy life insurance policies. Carl knew what a mortgage was and how to get one. He was on good terms with painters and on excellent terms with the sleek women and bulbous men who occasionally came to his gallery with money in their pockets and dullness in their eyes to buy a painting that would "go with" a new sofa or occasional chair.

Carl was a success, he never tired of telling his brother. He would know what to do about Crystal dy-



ing so inconveniently. The trouble was, Carl would preach.

Ever since Christopher had sundered his partnership with his brother, Carl had been predicting trouble, and now it had come in the grim guise of death. Carl had warned Christopher that painters came to no good end. And besides, he had pointed out, they almost never made any money.

"Call Carl," Grip said again, as the last of his orange disappeared into his mouth. "See you." He headed for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Where the wind goes. All over." He was at the door. He turned back to Christopher. "Better wake Lady-Next-Door. She came in last night

while you were out. She's under Crystal's daybed."

Grip left and Christopher hurried to the daybed and looked under it. Lady was there; Grip had been right. Huddled in a ball like a cold kitten, Lady-Next-Door was sound asleep, her palms supporting her head.

"Lady!"

She opened her eyes.

"Lady, you must get out of here. Now!" Christopher half dragged her out from under the bed. She stood up, smoothed her micro-skirt and pattered shoeless toward the door.

"I dreamed that Crystal was dead," she said.

"She is. But you didn't dream it. You heard Grip and I talking about it."

"All the same. All is one and one is all. She's dead, however you look at it."

The door closed behind her and Christopher made a thorough inspection of the loft but found no one else. When he was sure he was alone, he picked up the phone and dialed.

After several moments, he responded to the voice that was somewhere else in the city and that belonged to his brother.

"Carl, it's me. Crystal is dead and I don't know what to do."

Carl told him.

When Carl Montserrat arrived at the loft less than half an hour later, he boomed, "They'll think you did it. Did you?"

"No!"

Carl studied his brother's bowed head. Oh, he thought, what a harlot is success. And Christopher, although Carl admitted it with reluctance, was becoming an odd kind of success. Already his Kin-Esthetic was on everyone's lips and talked about between nibbles of hors d'oeuvres and sips of punch at every posh gallery opening.

"I told Regina what had happened," Carl said. "I phoned her before I came over."

Christopher looked up, shocked. "She'll hate me."

"She doesn't," Carl said. "She thinks the publicity will do you good."

"Regina's a dear. I don't know what I'd do without her."

"You'd starve. That's what you'd do."

Christopher ignored the anger in his brother's tense tone and the contempt in his voice. Mrs. Regina Whitworth, widowed, he reminded himself, was a gem. She — and her money — allowed him to practice his art without a worry about such mundane things as where the bread and wine would come from.

Carl, he thought, shouldn't be angry. Regina had enough money for both of them. He wondered if she still contributed to Carl's gallery. Regina had been Carl's find originally. He had shot her down at his showing of a duo of dull landscape artists six months ago. Since then, she had flown about the flame of art that Carl had kindled, and

that Christopher now stoked, like an eager and delighted moth.

Christopher stiffened in his chair. "What's that?" He'd heard the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs. A moment later came the expected knock on the door.

Christopher sat paralyzed, staring nervously at his brother.

Carl said calmly, "Come in."

Two business suited men entered the room first. Then two uniformed policemen.

Carl said, "I am Carl Montserrat and this is my brother, Christopher. The lady in question is Crystal. No known surname. Christopher, explain Crystal."

"Just a moment, please, if you don't mind," said the man in the flawlessly tailored suit. "Let me introduce myself. I am Wen Hai Toy, detective, homicide. This is my colleague, Detective Mario Bello."

Bello nodded, his granite face staring at Christopher

Toy was smiling. He showed his badge as if he were embarrassed by it. His voice was soft but one sensed that it could be hard if he decided a hard voice was needed. He was young, only thirty. He looked twenty. His straight black hair lay sedately above the plateau of his forehead and his almond eyes saw everything. His calm smile and air of placidity resembled those that might have once characterized a now vanished Chinese mandarin. His strong hands and muscular body resembled those of a trained tong killer.

"Please, sirs," Toy said. "Tell me about it, about her." He arroved a lean finger in the direction of the corpse that had been Crystal.

"She was my masterpiece," Christopher began. "She would have made me famous if she hadn't died."

Toy still smiled pleasantly. "She was to be your masterpiece," he said, repeating Christopher's words, changing only their tense. "I'm not at all sure that I understand."

Carl snorted loudly and pursed his lips. Before Christopher could reply, he told Toy, "My brother thinks of himself as an innovator." The sneer in his voice was almost palpable. "Christopher disdains the traditional. Instead of canvas, he used the body of this girl on which to create what he calls art. And instead of a palette and brushes, poor, misguided Christopher uses an air brush and fluorescent paints!"

"You painted her too!"

Carl gave his brother a weak smile. "It is true that I tried your clumsy technique, submitting to your persuasion. But not your hideous paints." Carl continued, turning to Toy, "I did it as an attempt to humor my brother. I own an art gallery on Sixty-fifth Street, Detective Toy."

"You are both painters?"

"Good heavens, no!" Carl grimaced. "I sell paintings. To me, paintings are a product, their creators, salesmen like myself."

"But you did paint Crystal!" Christopher persisted.

"As I've explained, that was only to humor you. Looking back now, I think you needed me to give it an air of respectability. You needed me to endorse what you were doing so you could really believe it was of value. Isn't that so, Christopher?"

Christopher glared at his brother.

Toy smiled, thinking. The currents of hostility between the brothers swirled and eddied in the room. Carl was the stronger of the two, no doubt about it. Or was there some doubt about it? Toy had long ago learned that loudness and bombast were not necessarily the true trumpets of power. They sometimes disguised the reluctant capitulation of a participant in battle. He said something about looking around the loft and went into the little kitchen.

Dirty dishes were piled high in the chipped and rusted sink. Cups sat on a wooden drain board beside it. Toy came back into the main room and, as if it were an afterthought on his part, one that had only just now occurred to him, lifted the sheet that covered Crystal. He saw no evidence of wounds. Perhaps this was not a matter for homicide after all. He spoke to one of the policemen, who picked up the phone and dialed.

Not long afterward, photographers arrived to record the position of the body and the contents of the room. Other men dusted the door jambs, window sills and tables for fingerprints. A doctor arrived with the ambulance and certified that

Crystal was indeed dead. Two men carried her out on a stretcher.

When it was all over, Toy addressed himself to the brothers Montserrat.

"There will be an autopsy to determine cause and time of death. I would appreciate it if you would both come down to the precinct station with me now and tell me all you know about Miss Crystal and her death. Would that be convenient?"

Before Christopher could answer, the door swung open and a young woman, followed by an equally young man, entered the room. The girl was blonde and pretty beneath the too-heavy makeup weighing down her features. The young man looked like a neurotic spaniel, sad and long suffering. Both of them, Toy judged correctly, were in their early twenties.

"Oh, Christopher," exclaimed the girl, "you have company, darling! All these beautiful men! What's the scene?" She went up to Bello and touched his cheek with her fingertips.

When he didn't respond, she passed on to Toy, undismayed. "And just who might you be, you great big China doll?"

Toy told her.

She looked questioningly at Christopher.

"Crystal," he said. "She's dead."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. "Poor thing!" Then, putting away her shock that had showed on her face, she

approached Christopher and enfolded his fatness in her arms. She whispered urgently in his ear while the young man that had come in with her suffered visibly.

A moment later, she turned triumphantly and announced, "Christopher says I'm to be his next masterpiece."

"This is Miss Lilith Dearing," Christopher said, as if in answer to an unspoken question.

"Did you know the deceased?" Toy asked her pleasantly.

"Everybody did, in one way or another," Lilith answered, with a glance at the young man who had come in with her. "Even Peter did, if you know what I mean."

"No, I never!" the young man protested.

"Sir," said Toy, "you are—"

"Peter Vine. I'm a friend of Lilith's." He paused. Then, as if gathering strength or will, blurted, "Lilith, please! Let's go home."

"Home, Peter, baby, is where the heart is," Lilith declared.

"Home," Peter snapped, growing angry, "is where you and I both should be, in Groton-on-Hudson. And you know it!"

"Square," Lilith said, before turning her attention to Toy. "What do you detect?"

For an instant, Toy was taken off balance. Then he replied, "Dark deeds and darker desires."

"Groovy," Lilith cried. Then, turning to Christopher, she said, "Remember now, you promised.



I'll be more of a masterpiece than Crystal ever was or could be. You just wait. You'll see." She turned provocatively, displaying the hills and valleys of her body.

Well, thought Toy. Well, well.

A DAY LATER as Hai Wen Toy sat with his feet upon his desk in the bleak office of the precinct station he said, "It was very definitely murder."

Mario Bello drank the last of his cold coffee and crumpled the paper container and tossed it into the waste basket. "Yep. Somebody killed her. We know that at least."

"Yes. The autopsy report says she died of lead poisoning. Christopher Montserrat admits she lived in his

loft. No one seems to be quite sure about who she was or where she came from."

"A dropout or a drifter, probably. The Village is full of them."

"Probably. She had no identification. She never left the loft, according to Christopher. In fact, that's where he displayed her."

"As an example of his—whatchamacallit."

"His Kin-Esthetic."

"Kooks all of 'em, you ask me."

"And a killer one of them."

"The Lilith number. Motive, jealousy."

"Could be. She might have killed Crystal in order to replace her, as it seems she is going to do. But there's at least one other possibility. Lilith's young man, Peter Vine. He might have killed Crystal in order to frighten his straying girl friend so that she wouldn't want to replace her, considering the manner of Crystal's death."

Toy took a letter from his pocket and sniffed the envelope. Not perfume, he decided. It had been smoked. In incense, he guessed. It was from Lilith Dearing and was addressed to him. The brown piece of paper inside the envelope had once been part of a grocery bag. Toy took it out and read again the painted words:

Come see me do my thing.

Love, Lilith

The address of Christopher Montserrat's loft was printed in the lower right hand corner. And the date

and time when Lilith, evidently, would "do her thing"—September 20th at seven P.M.

"They've all given us their statements," Toy remarked thoughtfully. "Nothing incriminating in any of them as far as I can tell. I think I'll continue the investigation in a less formal fashion."

Bello grunted a good-by and went back to the comic pages as Toy left the room.

When Toy arrived at the loft, he found it already crowded. Looking around at the gathered people, he wondered if he were present at the side show or at the circus itself. It was difficult to tell. Girls with glazed eyes and foot-long cigarette holders glided dreamily about the smoky room. Beards were visible and bells were audible and the men who wore both spoke earnestly together about such things as Karma and the death of Dada.

Someone offered Toy a cigarette and he took it, lit it, inhaled. His sinus passages suddenly seared and he coughed. His eyes began to water. He suppressed his impulse and made no arrest. He put the cigarette out in an already overflowing ashtray. Marijuana, he judiciously decided, would have to wait on murder.

He stared at the drape that hung in one corner, making a triangle of the corner with the drape as its upright base.

"Nasty old things," someone said,

taking his arm, referring to his dead cigarette.

Toy turned to confront the woman in the silk sari and the debris of diamonds that littered her ears, her neck, her fingers and her lush bosom that had reached his arm a full second before her hand had.

"How do you do?" said Toy.

"I'm Mrs. Regina Wentworth," replied the woman. "At least, in this incarnation. Before—well, I'm not quite sure who I was. But the Maharani says—"

Toy turned off. But not altogether. He smiled.

Encouraged, Regina Wentworth commented, looking around the room, "Isn't all this just too wonderful?"

Toy maintained his smile with some effort.

"Dear Carl and dear Christopher. Two pilgrims on the trail of beauty. And I— Ah, I am a lonely wayfarer who is lucky enough to be allowed to travel with them. They are kind, those dear boys. And Christopher! So talented!"

Regina suddenly abandoned him in favor of Christopher, who was strolling about the room, chatting with people in it like a humble mendicant soliciting alms.

"You're new here, aren't you?" The girl who had spoken to Toy was as insubstantial as a cloud. "I'm Lady-Next-Door."

"I'm Wen Hai Toy."

The girl pouted. "I couldn't care

less who you are. You don't recognize me!" An accusation.

"She's Miss Super Star," said a laconic male voice from somewhere behind Toy.

He turned and found Grip leaning against a wall. They introduced themselves.

Grip said, "She's Sandy's new find. Only don't ask me where he's been looking lately."

Lady began to cry tearlessly but noisily. No one turned or acknowledged the noise.

"She cries a lot," Grip commented, lighting a crumbling cigarette. "Pay no attention. She thinks it's expected of her since she is an artist and a star. You saw Sandy's latest film, *Lady-Next-Door*?"

"I'm afraid not," Toy admitted. "But I've heard about it."

"It took a week to show. Sister Scream there was featured in it. That's where she got her name."

"You mean she adopted the name of the film?"

"Yeah, man."

"Why doesn't she use her own name?"

Grip shook his head in disgust. "Man, that's a drag. You got to be free. Shake the identity crisis. Reach out, like."

Lady had stopped crying. She took Toy's arm. "Would you like some tea?"

Toy let her lead him to the dirty sink in the kitchen where she brewed tea and poured the amber liquid

into a cracked cup. Toy stared down into the cup.

"Hate to sound square," he said. "But there's something in the bottom of my cup."

"Let's see." Lady took the cup from him and peered into it. "Oh," she said brightly. "That's just dried vermillion paint. My favorite color. This is my private cup. See, it's got my initials painted on right here. I use it for just everything — tea, jewelry. Paint too, I'm afraid. Careless of me. Give it here. I'll wash it."

Toy shook his head. "Thanks, no."

He waited until Lady had drifted away from him like a morning mist and then he poured the tea into the sink. He took out a pen knife and scraped some of the dried paint from the bottom of the cup and wiped the blade on his handkerchief which he folded and replaced in his pocket.

A tambourine sounded in the other room. Toy left the kitchen and arrived in time to see the drape being drawn back and Christopher mounting the platform on which Lilith stood, completely nude except for the very briefest of bikinis.

"Come one, come all," Christopher was crying happily.

People climbed up onto the platform and crowded around Lilith. They dipped their fingers into the jars of paint resting on shelf nearby and began to paint Lilith. Soon her body was glowing with garish colors and eccentric designs.

"Detective Toy!" It was Christopher calling. "What a nice surprise to see you here."

"Lilith invited me," Toy said as Christopher came and placed an arm around his shoulder.

"Then participate, do. I insist. Lilith will be disappointed if you refuse."

"I can't even draw a straight line," Toy protested, somewhat embarrassed.

Christopher pursed his lips and started at Toy. "Really! I would have expected better of you, Detective Toy. There are no straight lines in nature. You don't have to know how to paint or even how to draw. Why, look over there. Even Carl is participating."

Toy looked. It was true. Carl, as Toy watched, connected the hose to Christopher's air brush and began to spray Lilith's elbow with chrome orange paint.

He held the brush gingerly as he fiddled with the pressure gauge on the air tank. The compressor on the floor beside the tank began to hum faintly.

"He doesn't seem very sure of himself," Toy observed. "What's he doing with that dial?"

"Adjusting the air pressure. He is trying, I will say that for him," Christopher said. "But he cannot seem to master the technique. I've tried to show him but it is just no use, I'm afraid. He is too much the traditionalist. For example, he will paint only in yellows and oranges.

He calls the other colors either too drab or too gaudy. As a creator, I'm afraid my brother is rather limited both in his perceptions and his technique. But please don't tell him that I said so. It is the old story."

"The old story?"

"Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."

"But your brother doesn't teach painting, does he?"

"No. What I meant was that Carl cannot create so he lives off those who can."

"His gallery?"

"Precisely. Now then. Do try your hand, Detective Toy."

Toy let himself be persuaded for reasons he chose not to analyze. While he streaked greens and violets down Lilith's spine, he told Christopher about the results of the autopsy.

"Lead poisoning!" Christopher bleated. "Could it have resulted from our skin painting?"

"No. The toxicologist says lead from the paint couldn't have seeped through Crystal's skin."

Christopher clucked noisily and painted the last petal of a white daisy on Lilith's thigh.

Regina Wentworth beckoned to Toy from the place at his right where she squatted, her fingers dripping redly. "You're doing fine, just fine! Art, you know, is not for mouldy museums or sterile galleries. Art belongs in the home and on the streets. That's what dear Christo-

pher always says. Art, he says, is *experience!*"

Toy presented her with a nod and a grin.

How did the lead get into Crystal's bloodstream, he asked himself again as he had been doing ever since the autopsy report had been submitted. He looked around the room. Lady stood in a corner drinking from the cup he had abandoned in the kitchen.

Christopher, following Toy's gaze, said, "Lady's latest fad. A Zen diet or something. Brown rice. Herbs. Tea. She insists everyone try it with her. She uses that cup of hers like a Holy Grail or something. Shares it with everyone. Calls it her loving cup."

"Did Crystal drink Lady's tea?"

"For a while. About two weeks."

"They shared the same cup? Lady's cup?"

"Yes."

"Did Lady ever complain about weakness? Did she experience nausea in the last few weeks, as far as you know?"

"Yes. Same as Crystal did, come to think about it. But that's because of that ridiculous diet. Lady hardly eats enough to keep a bird alive."

"Was Crystal on the same diet?"

"Oh, no. She tried the tea but that was all."

Toy made notes on the pad of his mind. It could be the tea. Or rather, the paint carelessly left in the tea cup that had poisoned Crystal. Carelessly? But then Christopher

had said that Lady had shown some of the same symptoms. A clever ruse? A way of diverting suspicion?

"Lady," Christopher was saying, "hated Crystal."

"Why?"

Christopher frowned. "Sandy said he was going to make her the star of his next movie. Something he had in mind called *Blast Off*. He picks them up and puts them down, you know. Crystal was next. No one lasts with Sandy."

"I see." Toy didn't really. He was still looking through a glass darkly and the images were murky. But he intended to keep looking.

"Excuse me," Christopher said. He turned and addressed the crowd. "*Consummatus est!*"

The crowd spilled from the platform in a carnival of color, beads swinging, bells ringing, voices exclaiming with delight over their collective handiwork.

Lilith smiled and turned slowly around as everyone applauded. Christopher went to her and picked up a can from the shelf. He began to spray her body with a mist that would fix the paint in place.

He was nearly finished when someone grabbed his arm and dragged him down from the platform. The can in his hand fell to the floor. Christopher gave an injured cry.

Toy shoved his way through the thick crowd.

Peter Vine saw him coming. He leaped onto the platform and stood in front of Lilith, arms spread out

as if to shield her from an enemy only he could see.

"Get out!" he yelled. "All of you. This isn't a peep show."

He was greeted with derisive hoots of laughter and a thin disdain that the members of the crowd reserved for invading Philistines.

Peter bent and picked up the fallen drape and placed it around Lilith's shoulders. She pushed him away angrily. He was about to strike her but Toy leaped to the platform and seized his upraised arm.

"Easy does it," Toy muttered.

Peter Vine started to protest. Struggling with both anger at Lilith and embarrassment at his own display of feeling, he let Toy lead him through the crowd and into the relative quiet of the kitchen.

"I wasn't going to hurt her," Peter told Toy.

"Yes, you were."

"Well, did you see? Do you blame me? I love her, you know. They don't. They're just using her. When someone else comes along they'll use them the same way. Why won't she come away with me?"

"You said something the other day about Groton-on-Hudson," Toy said. "Your home?"

Peter nodded, furiously brushing a hand across both eyes. "Hers too. We were going to be married. Then her parents got divorced six months ago and she came here. I don't know why. I only know I love her and want her."

"Did you kill Crystal?"

Peter stepped backward as if Toy had struck him. "Kill Crystal? Me? Are you crazy?"

"You knew that Lilith wanted to replace Crystal. You thought you'd put a scare into her by killing Crystal."

"No! I wasn't even here when Crystal died."

"But you've been here often during the last few weeks."

Peter Vine nodded.

"Then you were here when Crystal was dying. She'd been dying of lead poisoning for several weeks. It takes time for the poison to build up in the body."

"I didn't—"

"Maybe you didn't. But if you did, I'll find out."

Toy led the way back into the main room of the loft. He said goodby to Christopher and gave a wave and a smile to Lilith.

She blew him a kiss as the door closed behind him and made room for Peter to sit down beside her on the daybed.

Peter said, "I'm sorry, Lilith."

"Peter, you know I love you. At least, I think I do. But must you make scenes?" She sipped tea from Lady's cup which she held in both hands. She set the cup down on the floor and lay back on the bed, still draped in the cloth Peter had enfolded her in earlier. "I feel so tired. The excitement, I guess. And my stomach feels queasy."

"Can I get you something from the drugstore?"



Lilith smiled sweetly and touched Peter's lips with her scarlet and purple fingers. "No, but thanks. The tea Lady just gave me will settle my stomach, I'm sure. Now lay down here beside me and be still. Let's think of nice things. Like fame. And art."

SEVERAL DAYS later, Hai Wen Toy was sitting in his office when a patrolman popped his head in the door and said, "Guy outside says he wants to see you. Name of Vine."

For a moment, Toy could not place the name. And then, "Send him in."

Peter Vine burst into the room like a tightly coiled spring suddenly released. "Detective Toy, I've got to talk to you!"

"I am listening. How are you, Peter?"

Peter ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm okay, I guess. But Lilith — she's sick. I think somebody's trying to kill her like they did Crystal."

Outwardly, Toy appeared calm. Inwardly, he surrendered to the excitement of the hunt.

"She's weak," Peter said. "She vomits and complains of pains in her joints. She looks awful!"

Toy recognized the symptoms as those which had afflicted Crystal for some time before her death, according to Christopher's account. "Do you suspect anyone?"

Peter hesitated. "Lots of people. That loft is full of nuts, you ask me!"

"You suspect—"

"Christopher Montserrat. He's always after Lilith to do more than model for him. And Lady! Lady hates Lilith as much as she ever hated Crystal. She wants to model or whatever they call what Christopher has his girls do only Christopher says she's too skinny. Then there's the brother."

"Carl?"

"Yes, Carl. Have you ever noticed how his hands clench and unclench every time he talks to his brother? If Carl is the killer, I'll bet Christopher is his next victim."

"You haven't been able to persuade Lilith to go back home with you?"

Peter sat down and groaned. "No. She says there's nothing to go home to or for. I told you that her parents just got divorced."

"Yes."

"It was a shock to Lilith. She's lost, is what she is. Why lately, she won't even let me touch her. I tell you, I get so frustrated and mad I could—" Peter gave Toy a wry

smile. "You can relax, Toy. I wasn't going to say I could kill her. I was going to say I could turn her over my knee and spank the living daylights out of her."

"We have nothing to go on yet in the case of Crystal," Toy said. "We know someone killed her, induced fatal lead poisoning. To be specific, the autopsy indicated that the substance in Crystal's body was lead chromate. It forms the pigment of certain paints such as lemon chrome yellow. The question remains however. Who killed Crystal?"

"A painter!" Peter exclaimed, obviously annoyed by what he evidently considered to be Toy's obtuseness.

"Christopher is a painter," Toy remarked.

"So is Lady. Grip too. And Regina Wentworth. Even Carl."

"Carl, I've been led to believe, is a dabbler. As is Mrs. Wentworth."

"True. But there's still Lady and Grip and Christopher."

"I'd like to talk to Lilith."

"I wish you would. I really do. Listen, maybe you can convince her to get herself out of that nuthouse before she gets herself dead."

When Toy arrived at Lilith's walk-up flat, he found her in tears. She looked pale and her hands shook as she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"Are you feeling—" Toy ventured.

"Lousy!" Lilith moaned. "I'm

feeling one hundred per cent lousy! Christopher has abandoned me!"

Toy nodded as if he understood but he did not.

Lilith explained. "For Regina Wentworth. That old bat!"

Lilith burst into fresh tears. "I'm sick." She explained that Christopher had let Regina persuade him to replace her, Lilith, with her own ample self. Money, according to Lilith, talked and in Regina's case it talked loudly and at length. And Christopher had been a good listener.

Toy offered a suggestion. "Why don't you go home with Peter where you belong? Get married. Paint on Sunday afternoons. Have babies."

Lilith made a grotesque face. "Don't be a drag!"

Toy gave it up as hopeless. "You said you were sick. What seems to be the trouble?"

Lilith gripped her stomach. "I'm nauseous," she replied. "Only it's not really so bad the last couple of days. But before that—ooohhh!"

"Did you see a doctor?"

"No."

"You should."

"I'm okay now."

Within a week Regina Wentworth was dead. Toy was summoned to Christopher's loft in which she had died.

Christopher wailed and wrung his hands. "I don't understand! First Crystal and now dear Regina. I must bring the girls bad luck."

Toy arranged for photographs of

the body to be taken and then, when it had been removed, he questioned Christopher. He learned that Regina had provided an exemplary canvas. When Toy expressed some doubt about this, Christopher haughtily explained that it was not the canvas on which a painting was rendered that was important but the rendering itself. Toy did not pursue the matter.

He was about to leave when Lady drifted in from the kitchen, drinking tea.

"Grip," she said, "says California's where it's at. Big Sur and like that."

"He's gone?" Christopher inquired.

"Gone. I made him leave this behind though." Lady felt in the pocket of the smock she wore. Her hand found nothing there. She frowned and then brightened. She poked her right index finger into the tea cup and came up with an emerald brooch. She wiggled her finger and the emeralds glowed. "Grip—uh—borrowed it from Regina before he split."

Toy took it from her. "I'll see to it that her lawyer gets it. Thank you."

"Grip needed money," Lady explained. "But I hate to see anyone take advantage of a lady. So I made him give me the brooch so I could return it. But then Regina died."

Lady left. Toy shrugged. Christopher telephoned Lilith.

WHEN TOY REACHED his office, he phoned the morgue. He urged speed on the part of the men scheduled to perform the autopsy on Regina Wentworth's body. Then he sat down and picked up his copy of Sartre and settled back with his feet on his desk to read, to wait, to wonder.

During the rest of the day, he divided his attention between Sartre and his ringing telephone. Sartre told him that existence is essentially meaningless and life absurd. The voices on his telephone told him otherwise.

The next morning, Toy returned to Christopher's loft. He found Lilith Dearing there, looking more radiant than the sun. Her radiance arose from her smile and from the colors that careened across the curves of her body. Christopher crouched beside her, paint spraying in an almost invisible stream from the air brush in his hand. When he heard Toy enter, he frowned.

"Can't you leave us alone?"

Toy said, "Call your brother, Christopher. I have something important to say to all of you. And Lady — find her. Lilith, where is your young Peter?"

"Sulking in our pad on Third Street," Lilith replied. "Must you bring that voice of doom here?"

"I must bring the murderer here," Toy said.

His remark was greeted with silence and worried stares. Toy gestured to the phone.

Carl Montserrat promised to come at once. Lady was discovered sleeping beneath the daybed. Peter Vine arrived, carrying flowers, but Lilith refused them and insisted that she was remaining right here in the East Village in the middle of the eye of life as she somewhat dramatically put it. Peter lapsed into a sudden silence, his flowers lying forgotten on the bare floor. Lady brewed tea and drank it noisily from her cup.

Toy announced, "I intend to show you all how to paint properly."

Lilith giggled. Christopher merely stared at Toy and Carl sniffed with disdain.

Toy picked up a piece of oil cloth that lay in a corner of the loft and unrolled it. He beckoned to Christopher and Carl. "Hold this up. Use both hands. One here and one here at the bottom. Stretch it fairly taut."

When it was stretched to Toy's satisfaction, he picked up Christopher's air brush and tested it against the palm of his hand. He moved to the oil cloth that Christopher and Carl were holding.

"Watch," he ordered. He began to spray the oil cloth with paint from the bottle suspended beneath the brush. He held the nose of the brush close to the cloth.

"I don't see anything," Christopher said. "What are you—"

Toy did not answer. He reached behind him and adjusted the gauge on the air cylinder.

"There's already enough air pressure!" Christopher exclaimed as the dial registered one hundred and fifty pounds.

"For ordinary painting, yes," said Toy cryptically. He brought the air brush still closer to the oil cloth.

"Look, you punctured it!" Lilith cried. "Look, the paint is seeping right through!"

But Toy was no longer interested in his demonstration. "Vine!" he yelled. "Get him!"

It took Peter several seconds to realize that Toy was yelling at him. By that time, Carl was almost out the door. Toy yelled again, dropped the air brush and sprinted after Carl.

Lady yawned.

Together, Toy and Peter dragged the struggling and protesting Carl back into the room.

"You were a good student," Toy said to Carl.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Let me go!"

"I will not let you go," Toy said. "But I will tell you what I am talking about. Your reported reluctance to paint the ladies—Crystal, Lilith, Regina—misled me at first. At first, I suspected Christopher. But you were the one who killed Crystal and Regina, Carl. And you almost killed Lilith."

"Carl!" Christopher cried. "Whatever in the world?"

"A matter of pressure," Toy said. "For most air brush painting or for photo retouching, thirty or thirty-five pounds of pressure is sufficient.

But I noticed that Carl was using one hundred and fifty pounds and even more at times. I began to wonder why."

"It was for a special effect I was after!" Carl shouted, beginning to perspire. "I wanted to—"

"Kill," Toy said calmly.

"Carl, did you kill Crystal?" Christopher asked, his voice a mere whisper. "And Regina?" He looked as if he was about to cry.

Toy said, "The tiny needle in the shaft of the air brush is used to control air flow. Normally, it was used by Carl to puncture the skin of his victims slightly. They would barely notice it under the circumstances—the pressure of the air itself, the occasional touch of the gun nozzle in Carl's hands. After the skin had been punctured, Carl increased the air pressure in order to drive deadly amounts of paint into the blood-streams of the murdered women."

"But surely paint can't kill!" Lilith said.

"Lead chromate can," Toy assured her. "Lead chromate," he explained, "is a white crystalline substance in its original form. It is the basis of chrome orange and chrome yellow pigments. Carl's favorite colors, as you will all recall. Carl, in mixing his paints, used an excessive amount of lead chromate. A substance which, in the hands of an artist can create great beauty. A substance which, in the hands of a murderer, can create painful death."

Carl remained impassive. He did

not even notice Lilith step down from the stand and begin to dress. She went to Peter, who put a protective arm around her without taking his eyes from Carl or the wonder from his face.

Toy said, "Carl killed Crystal to discredit your Kin-Esthetic, Christopher. He thought you'd stop because of the notoriety the murder brought. He failed to realize that notoriety is often courted and, if I may say so, exploited."

"It's true," Christopher admitted. "After Crystal's death, more people came here to study my Kin-Esthetic than ever before."

"But why?" Lilith whispered. "Why would Carl want to hurt Christopher?"

"He didn't want that exactly," Toy said as he snapped one handcuff on Carl's wrist and the other one on his own and advised Carl of his rights. "He wanted Regina Wentworth. Or, rather, her money. I checked and discovered that his gallery was heavily in debt. Carl was on the verge of bankruptcy. Regina had been his patron until Christopher and his Kin-Esthetic came along."

"She was a silly old fool!" Carl said suddenly. "Any new fad, no matter how ridiculous, attracted her like catnip. She had no artistic values!"

"She did!" Christopher contradicted. "She was a true primitive."

Toy said, "She began giving her

money to you, Christopher, instead of to Carl. Am I right?"

Christopher nodded with evident reluctance.

"Carl decided that if he couldn't get any more money from Regina, he would at least see to it that you would not get any either, Christopher. So he killed her, as earlier he had tried to kill Lilith in a further attempt to discredit you. Lead chromate is a slow-acting poison. It takes time and repeated doses to build up lethal strength in the body. He had just begun to inject it into Lilith when Regina replaced her—unfortunately for Regina."

Lilith whispered to Peter. Toy was close enough to them to overhear. "Pete, I want to go home."

"To Third Street?" Peter asked warily.

"No, to Groton-on-Hudson. I'll paint on Sundays. And have a mortgage and lots of babies. Yours." She winked, a little sadly, at Toy.

He returned her wink. Then he ordered Carl to precede him toward the door.

Christopher said goodby to Toy and offered his hand to his brother. Carl ignored him.

Lady, Toy noticed with amazement, had fallen asleep on the daybed. Lilith and Peter had disappeared. And he, an oriental alchemist, was already beginning to turn the lead of evil into the gold of good. In his mind, a poem was being born, one he suspected would be both striking and sad: *Color her dead.*

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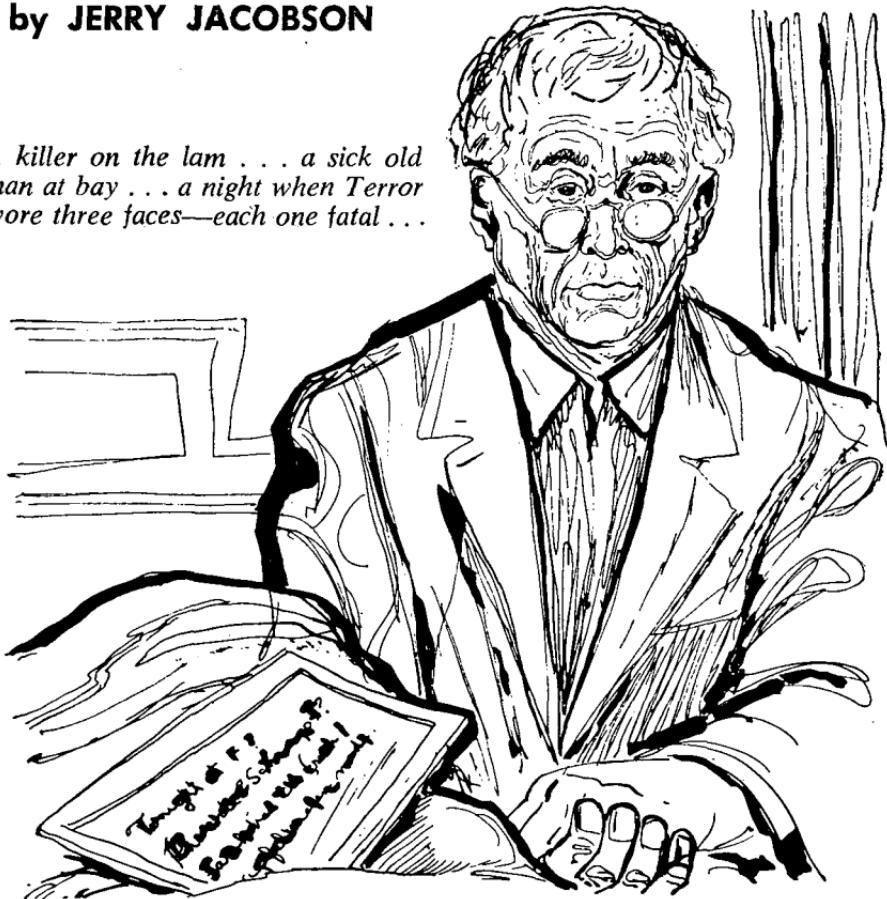
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July-1971

by JERRY JACOBSON

A killer on the lam . . . a sick old man at bay . . . a night when Terror wore three faces—each one fatal . . .



THE FINAL FACE

WHEN THE SMALL bell clinging like an over-sized bug on the white laboratory wall let out its soft burr, Doctor DeGroppe gave a little bit of a start. He continued with the packing of one of the precision

milling machines, setting it securely against one wall of the large wood packing crate and locking it there with three strips of masking tape.

DeGroppe removed his white work smock and drew a large sigh.

Now that he had decided to retire, he had hoped the break would be made cleanly, that he could be packed and gone in two or three days without any further complications.

Yet again he hoped one thing, that his caller was not a fresh patient but just a passer-by, someone asking directions in this Massachusetts wilderness. He hoped it might be one of his sparsely strung out neighbors who had trudged through the deep fall of New England snow to borrow coal oil, or a light bulb, or one or another of the medicines he could always be counted upon to have on hand for emergencies.

He left the lights burning in the reconverted garage and moved up into the living area of his six-room rambler. He had no car. Having one, in some cases, would have been too great a temptation to his patients to steal out of panic and necessity.

In his rustically furnished living room, he pulled the chain of a floor lamp near his reading chair and then went to the front door. He opened the tiny window and peered through the opening. To his dismay, he saw the face of a young man he did not know, and sensed precisely why he'd come.

"You Dr. Linus DeGroppe?" the young man said.

"Yes, I am," DeGroppe said. "But I am no longer in practice. I'm very sorry but you'll have to find someone else."

The young man's face twisted. "But I came nearly three hundred

miles. I paid two hundred dollars to a syndicate physician in New Jersey just to get your name and address. Dr. DeGroppe, you can't turn me down, not after I've come all this way!"

He could, indeed, turn this young man down. A man, whatever his profession, had to draw the line and stick to it. When he quit, it had to be clean, with no exceptions. Of course, he did not want to trigger his young stranger into violence, though from his slender build and his frightened eyes he did not look at all the kind of man who might take to that resort. But Dr. DeGroppe had been deceived by the look of a man before.

"What is the name of the syndicate doctor who referred you?" DeGroppe asked cautiously.

"Dr. Mundale," said the young man. "In Elizabeth. I'm Zep Minone."

"And who referred you to Dr. Mundale?"

"Eugene Bellasco," the young man said. "I ran into him in Jersey City two weeks ago. You worked on his face after he did three contracts and the other side put out one on him. He told me you're a genius, but you charge plenty. I don't worry about the charge. I can pay, Dr. DeGroppe, and I can pay in cash."

"You don't know Mr. Bellasco."

"Never met him before I plopped down next to him in that bar in Jersey City. I heard of him, though. Best West Coast triggerman the syn-

dicate ever had as a hitter. Calls himself Vic Callabrese now."

DeGroppe still was not sold. If there was one single trait in him which had served to keep his illicit practice going all these years it was his deep, unrelenting suspicion. The woods were full of federal agents trying to track down syndicate surgeons. The man who told this new visitor about DeGroppe could be one, and not the former Eugene Bellasco. And this young man could be a federal officer, not a frightened kid on the lam.

"Tell me," said DeGroppe, "why would a total stranger confide in another total stranger? Mr. Bellasco was warned of the extreme danger in letting anyone other than Dr. Mundale and myself know about his new identity."

"Well, we aren't exactly complete strangers. He's heard about my particular problem. And you don't go into the Playfair Club unless you're getting in out of the syndicate lead flying around. Let's just chalk it up to the fact that I convinced Bellasco I was who I said I was, and that he'd enough drinks under his belt to trust me."

DeGroppe was not sure of him. But there was one sure test he could make. He went to a nearby office desk, pulled open a side drawer and withdrew a file folder. From it he extracted a half-dozen 8x10 glossy photographs and held them up to the small opening at a distance that

would allow his visitor to see the entire photo.

"All of my patients are requested to send me photographs of their new faces when the healing processes have been completed. Copies are kept in a safe deposit box to insure my own safety. If you've really met the new Eugene Bellasco then you should have no trouble picking out his new face, the one he calls Vic Callabrese."

The young, grisly face checked the photos as DeGroppe held them up to him, one by one. He seemed puzzled. "Hey, what is this? Some kind of trick? The face I saw in the Playfair Club in Jersey City isn't *any of those*."

DeGroppe's suspicions eased off. He selected four more photographs and repeated the process. When the second photo was presented the voice spoke up. "That's the one. That's Vic Callabrese, the guy I saw in the Playfair Club."

The kid seemed all right, but DeGroppe was still upset. He had hoped to end his practice cleanly and now, here was another one banging at his door for a miracle, asking that an aged, shaking hand to become young and steady once more, asking a bad heart to hold up under still another operation.

"You know my fee," DeGroppe said through the tiny opening.

The young face nodded and as it did, DeGroppe could see numerous scars slashed and healed on the pock-marked face. "Five thousand. Yes,

I know. I have the money with me."

"You have facial scars," said Dr. DeGroppe. "They present surgical complications, and will increase the price considerably."

"By how much?"

"Two thousand, perhaps three. I won't know until I make an examination in better light. One moment."

Dr. DeGroppe pulled a latch bolt and removed a chain lock and let Zep Minone inside. His young visitor was in his middle twenties, his face a picture of the bony rawness he had witnessed in countless other criminals who had come to his door.

The blue pupils of his eyes seemed just pinholes, characteristic of the hunted and frightened. He wore a light-weight sport coat over a black turtleneck sweater and expensive Italian loafers, indicative of a man frantically on the run and giving no thought to encountering the New England wilderness on foot.

"Follow me," DeGroppe said.

DeGroppe led Minone through his living room, then down the narrow hallway past the kitchen. He stopped there and turned.

"Are you hungry?"

The boyish face turned yet another twist of forgiveness, a face for a moment belying the evil it had done—robbery, kidnaping or worse.

"I ate yesterday some time," Minone said. "I had a sandwich in a diner outside Boston. It's hard to remember. When you're on the run, your stomach is the last thing you

think about until you slow down."

"I have some cold turkey and ham," said Dr. DeGroppe. "Would a sandwich do? And some milk?"

"If I don't have to pay another thousand for it."

At last finding the refuge and transformation point he had been seeking, Minone now relaxed and ate as DeGroppe pondered his face across the porcelain kitchen table.

It was a face which, had it received kindness, could have conceivably given kindness in return. But it was too late now for any indulgence in kindnesses. The quick eyes which could not concentrate long on food without quick glances up to see if it was protected, bespoke the code of the criminal and the gangster—the face of expendability, take nothing and no one for granted, and take everything and everyone for all they were worth.

"What is that scar on your left cheek?" DeGroppe asked.

"Bullet crease," said Minone, not even looking up from his sandwich, as though the incident that had caused it and its disfiguration were all part of the game and the risk.

"I wanted a district in Jersey City and the competition figured the best way to keep the new boy down and out was to fit me for a permanent hole in the ground."

"And how was that matter finally resolved?" Dr. DeGroppe asked.

"One of them's in a plot reserved for me, and the other won't be far

behind or too far down the line from him."

"And I take it that is why you are currently on the run and have sought out my services?"

"I held that district for over a year. That's how old the scar is. I just made the mistake of taking big bites before my mouth was large enough to chew them. They put a double contract out on me, two goons who waited for me to finish a meal in a Brighton restaurant. They died hungry."

Dr. DeGroppe nodded and moved over to the stove for a cup of coffee simmering since seven. He didn't know why he had drawn Zep Minone into the confession of his exploits. His patients and their deeds always revulsed him, revulsed him nearly as much as his own alliances with them.

He knew they were criminals without asking and yet he always probed them for the dark turns their lives had taken to bring them to his doorstep. Perhaps he only wanted their criminal acts confessed verbally. He was a man of records and precision; and he liked all things precise and for the record.

"The operation itself," said Dr. DeGroppe, as he sat back down, "will take approximately six hours, depending on how much building I will do to the separate areas of your face. That is not to infer that the first operation will be successful. Plastic, while it is a revolutionary substance for alteration of the human

facial appearance, is only as useful as the surgeon working in it. Do not be disappointed if several operations are done before your original features are successfully altered."

"How long will I be here?"

"Three days at least. After the operations are finished, you will be required to wear a plastic moulage for two weeks. The moulage is nothing more than a plastic skin mask, medically treated to heal your scars, and done in the likeness of your present features.

"I have a machine which rolls liquid plastic to a thickness of two and one-half thousandths of an inch. To that will be applied through pressure a layer of artificial skin one-half of one-thousandth of an inch thick. When I've finished the natural tissues and features and coloring of the face you now have will be nearly impossible to detect as a mask."

"You mean, nobody will be able to tell I'm wearing a face that's been artificially made?"

"No one passing you on a city street will even be able to detect the face covering your new appearance is not real," said DeGroppe. "But precautionary restraint is advised. That means, stay to your hotel room and to yourself as much as possible during this two-week period."

"After these two weeks are up I come back here and you remove the mask. Right?"

Dr. DeGroppe smiled and shook his head. "You will be furnished all the necessary implements and chem-

icals to do that yourself. The mask's removal will be as simple as peeling the skin from a tangerine."

Zep Minone wiped his face with a paper napkin. "Sounds good. But I got a couple of questions. First, what kind of face are you gonna give me?"

"I will compose a sketch," said DeGroppe, "slightly altering all of your present features. Then, fixing you up with breathing tubes, I'll take a plaster cast of your current face and tool the cast with styluses until I've duplicated the sketch."

"Just any old face?"

"Your new features will be dictated by the bone structure and the amounts of flesh I have to deal with. To ease your mind, it will be a good face, presentable in public and like none other in the world."

"Maybe it'll be good enough to get me in the movies, old-timer," Minone laughed. "I never had Hollywood babes fighting over me before. Yeah, that's something I could really get used to!"

DeGroppe made no reply. He poured Minone a second glass of milk.

"You mentioned about my scars. How do you get rid of them?"

"They will be got rid of by filling them in. I've developed a revolutionary surgical jell which sets in eight to twelve hours. We'll apply that tonight after we've poured the plastic mold."

"And when do we begin the sur-

gery?" asked Minone, sipping his milk uneasily.

"Just as soon as I've completed the sketch for your new face and I've tooled the plastic working model. Probably some time late tomorrow afternoon."

"I want to okay my new face before the operation," Minone said, grimacing at Dr. DeGroppe across the table.

"Of course. It is only natural that you approved of your new look. After all, you'll be living with this face the rest of your life."

After his meal, Dr. DeGroppe took Zep Minone into his laboratory and introduced him to the equipment which would transform his features. Most of the machines Dr. DeGroppe had conceived and manufactured himself. It gave him a great deal of pride to show them off and it also served to heighten his patient's confidence that the operation would come off successfully.

He showed Minone the long steel work table and sink, jammed with vials and bottles of chemicals, both liquid and solid.

"This is where the liquid plastics will be mixed," he explained to Minone. "This small pressure-vacuum press will roll out the mask which will cover your new face during the healing period. And this machine, called a pore-puncture punch, will be used in case any of your natural skin tissue needs to be drained. The chemicals you see lined there will

produce skin pigmentation and coloring."

"Yeah, this is really impressive, old-timer," Minone said, confident now. "You know, I expected some back room operation with some madman wielding rusty steak knives and a sap for anesthesia."

Minone reached into an inside pocket of his sports coat, briefly exposing a .38 caliber pistol and black shoulder holster. He drew out a brick of bills an inch thick. He began counting out, in random denominations no smaller than a hundred, the amount of Dr. DeGroppe's fee.

"Eight thousand, you said?"

"That should be sufficient, I think!"

"That's plain highway robbery, if you ask me. But I'll pay it, what with this being the only game in town."

"You are under no obligation, Mr. Minone. You can go back out that front door and no one will be the wiser."

"But inside of a week, I'll be the deader," said Minone. "Eight thousand! You can count it if you want. Now, let's see what you can do about making me pretty and getting me into the movies, doc."

It was while DeGroppe was drawing up his working sketch that the sharp pain began in his chest. Suddenly his breath began to catch in his throat. A doctor knew all the signs; he was having another stroke.



"Hey, Doc! What is it? You sick or something?"

"Stroke," DeGroppe gasped as he slumped forward at his desk. His left arm and side went rigid as stone and the room began to slide and tumble like pieces of colored glass in a kaleidoscope.

"Pills," he gasped. "In bottle. Gr—green one on the desk. Two of them."

An hour later, DeGroppe opened his eyes. He was on his living room couch. Minone must have carried him there from the lab. There was still a mild pain in his chest but the stroke had passed by without taking his life.

"How do you feel, Doc?" said Minone, standing over him. "You gave me a real scare back there. You get these strokes very often?"

"More often lately, I'm afraid."

"Well, just make sure one doesn't pop up when we're doing the operation."

De Groppe looked at Minone steadily.

"I'm not doing the operation," he said. "I made up my mind I was all through with it before you showed up, and I'm following through on that promise. You can have your money back, Mr. Minone, and then everything will be square."

Zep Minone's voice took on a chill DeGroppe did not like. "That money was to buy me a new face and a new life. I walk out of here with the face I'm wearing and I'm as good as dead."

"You'll find another plastic surgeon," said DeGroppe.

"Where? On the West Coast, where they've got every goon south of Sacramento hunting for my head? Chicago, where all I have to do is set a foot down in The Loop and I get it shot off? No, Doc, you're it. You're my ticket to a new life."

"And what will happen if I refuse?" said DeGroppe.

Zep Minone did not answer verbally. He let his right hand speak for him, curling the ends of fingers into fleshy brass knuckles and then sending them into DeGroppe's jaw three, four, five times.

"A little sample, DeGroppe. But there'll be more. Believe me, I'll leave you in little pieces all over this room. I'll make you wish for another stroke, Doc. I'll make you hurt so bad you'll wish for one."

Blood trickled out of the corner of DeGroppe's mouth and he swallowed it until the bleeding stopped.

This marked the first time any of them had hit him, had done anything physical to him. They had all respected him as a surgeon. They had talked to him roughly, belligerently, but none had shown him the disrespect of Zep Minone.

"There are people know I'm here," Minone said. "Like your photographs in that safe deposit box, I laid some insurance of my own. You'll do the operation. And you'll do it right. Or there'll be people come by who'll make you a new face like you never seen before."

DeGroppe wasn't being offered much of a choice. His heart might decide to give out any day, any minute. But he didn't want his life prematurely ended by someone like Zep Minone.

"Doc, what's say we get to work?"

DeGroppe, hating Zep Minone with each passing instant, did the only thing he had left to do. He nodded assent.

Once again, DeGroppe drew up his sketch, working from an old photograph in his files, adapting it, rearranging it, going back to other photos and old sketches until he had what he wanted, a face that would conform with Minone's bone structure.

Three hours he was at it, with Zep Minone watching over his shoulder until it was finished.

"Well, that's it. You approve?"

Minone gave the sketch close scrutiny.

"Hmm," he said, pleased. "Not

bad. Makes me look a little more All-American. Real good looking guy, one who'll make it with the ladies. Yeah, DeGroppe. I approve."

DeGroppe worked over Zep Minone until five A.M., pouring the plastic mold which would not be used and then filling in the pock marks and bullet creases and knife slashes dealt Minone's face in attempts to settle arguments. When it was over DeGroppe put Zep Minone to bed, where he slept the deep sleep of the fugitive who had at last found safe refuge from the hunt.

It was shortly after noon when Dr. DeGroppe himself woke from his sound, six-hour sleep. He made fresh coffee and then looked in on Zep Minone bedded down in his spare bedroom. He found him awake in a sitting position in bed, reading a magazine and puffing on the stub of a cigar. He looked well-rested and comfortable.

"No pain, no strain, Doc."

DeGroppe bent and softly checked Minone's jell-filled scars. They had set nicely. "Yes, everything's going along smoothly."

"You've probably been in this racket a long time, huh, Doc?" the kid said making conversation.

"I did my first operation in 1951. A young man evading the draft, as I recall. He robbed two banks less than six months later. He was on his way back to me for a second face when the Massachusetts police caught him in a roadblock. Many people recognized him as the robber

of two banks, but no one could identify the body. A face without a name isn't likely to have acquired many friends in six months."

"You won't catch me in that situation," Minone said. "I'll hide out a year and when the heat's off, I'll go about getting a whole new identity, put on a whole new personality even. Like Bellasco, this guy who steered me to Doc Mundale, I'm going to have a brand-new face and that'll give me a brand-new life."

"That you will have, without a doubt," said Dr. DeGroppe. "Well, what do you say to a little breakfast?"

"I say lead me to it and then let's get me under the knife," Minone said. "I got a whole new life to begin and I don't want to waste any more of it being Zep Minone."

"Well, don't expect a beginning until about four o'clock. I still have a lot of preparations to make."

DeGroppe put Minone out under anesthesia at four-fifteen. It was a long operation, three and a half hours, but Minone's face submitted itself easily to DeGroppe's scalpel. No further operations were necessary.

At nine o'clock, DeGroppe applied the healing medicines to his masterpiece of transformation and then covered the new face with the membrane-thin plastic moulage. Finally, he carefully sutured it along the edges, where the fine threads could be removed by Minone himself.

After washing up, he spent a long minute observing the plastically masked Zep Minone, asleep like a baby. He judged this mask to be just about his finest piece of work. Its perfection even gave him a second thought to his firm resolution to retire. That, of course, was impossible. The years had placed danger on every side of him, had caused him to move the residency of his home and laboratory often.

It was wisest to quit the game when one was ahead. In his retirement, he could only hope that when men met to consider the worthiness of their peers, they would have ample records and facts at their disposal to judge that Dr. Linus DeGroppe had been a man who had justly served mankind.

Zep Minone, now a face without a name, at least to Minone's way of thinking, slept well and comfortably until after dawn the next morning. The day was bright and sunny and DeGroppe set up breakfast on the front porch of his home to allow Minone the advantage of fresh air and sunshine.

Minone was amazed that the plastic mask concealed his new features and yet was rubbery enough to allow him to eat his first solid food in eighteen hours. And he gave it a thorough test, through three helpings of country sausage, hash browns, scrambled eggs, toast and mint jelly. When he was finished, he pushed his wicker chair back from the table

and drew his first deep, contented breath of air in many years.

"You don't know what it feels like, Doc, not having to run and hide any more. Not having to check every face in the neighborhood drug store before you go in for a pack of razor blades. Not having to steer clear of strangers because they might know you and are just waiting for the chance to slap you on the back with one hand and slip a blade between your ribs with the other."

"It even offers the opportunity to go straight," said Dr. DeGroppe. "Think of it, Minone. A real chance to get away from the big cities and the gangs, the little cement-parties-for-one, the contracts out you can't read in another man's mind. Your new face offers you better than a fifty-fifty chance to bury your past forever."

But Zep Minone was only lightly listening, as he removed the .38 from his belt and began dismembering its parts with a pocket knife. "Bury the past? Sorry, Doc, but I got a couple other burials to take care of first and then a district in Jersey to get back."

"And a clean break with that kind of life might be just what you need right now."

"What I need right now," said Zep Minone, as though this piece of conversation had not even taken place, "is a can of oil for this black beauty of mine."

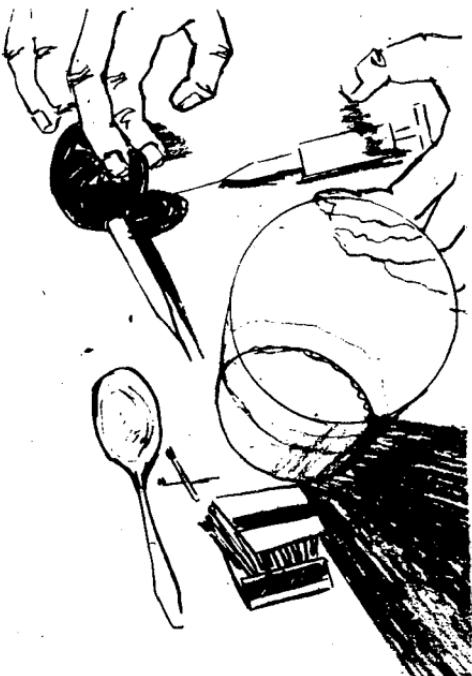
Throughout the day, DeGroppe checked the sutures to make certain

none had snapped and questioned his patient about facial itching beneath the moulage which was the danger sign that bacterial infection had taken hold in freshly exposed tissue.

The only itching Zep Minone experienced, he informed DeGroppe, was the growing itch to get back into the business of his life, the fevered impatience for the darkness of evening to settle over the wilderness.

After a quiet dinner, Dr. DeGroppe instructed Minone in the art of removing the temporary mask. He showed him the set of three scalpels he was to use and how to employ them against the thin sutures; and the vial of loosing chemical he was to apply at points beneath his chin where scalpel work was difficult. And finally, Minone's education to the vital sulfadiazine treatments, three times daily for ten days to insure his new features against bacterial infection.

At the kitchen table, Minone listened seriously to the properties concerning the "care and feeding" of his new face. But Dr. DeGroppe sensed something else besides studious attention in those small eyes behind the mask, a tentative deviousness which made him extremely uncomfortable. Their friendship of the past few days seemed imperceptibly changing, as if Minone was purposely setting up distance between them for some betrayal he was planning to make.



At eleven that evening, DeGroppe armed Zep Minone with his final equipment and instructions, a small canvas bag containing his instruments and medicines and a road map which would lead him to Boston through the back door of New England.

They were sitting at the porcelain table in the kitchen having a final cup of evening coffee when the expected betrayal came. When the .38 pistol appeared, pointing at his upper chest across the table, Dr. DeGroppe wanted to reach out and tear it from his hand. He checked himself; it was men like Minone who acted on sudden impulse, and died early deaths because of it.

"What now? I suppose you want to drag me along as a hostage until you've discovered I've given you a suitable face?"

"Believe me, I'd like to. But you'd only slow me down. No, I trust you to keep your end of the bargain. It's only guys like me who turn the double-cross."

"What do you want, then?"

"A little change from that eight thousand I gave you," Minone said.

"That was the price we agreed upon."

"Mister, the only thing in my life I ever agreed upon was not to make agreements. I want four thousand back. I also want that supply of methedrine, plus that container of heroin you got in your lab."

"The methedrine and the heroin," said DeGroppe, "are for experimental use only."

"Well, then I won't be breaking rules with it then, because I plan to do a little experimenting myself. I figure you got about eight ounces of horse there. By the time I cut it and mix it with a little milk sugar, get it in caps and out on the street, I got a twenty-five thousand dollar business. Now, let's you and me move into that lab of yours and do a little midnight shopping!"

DeGroppe decided the best course of action to take was strict compliance with Minone's demands, praying that he would not be killed. He hadn't many years left in life, but as he grew older the years became more precious.

He gave Minone his four thousand dollars change, the methedrine, the heroin, his total supply of ten thousand empty pill capsules. And then, with his back turned, he felt the butt of Minone's pistol crack against his skull twice and the white tiled floor of his laboratory flew into his face.

Dr. DeGroppe woke in a pool of blood, unaware of just how long he had been unconscious, but gratefully savoring the fact that he was still alive.

When his head was treated and dressed, DeGroppe surveyed his physical losses. As promised, Zep Minone had taken the drugs and empty capsules in addition to a number of hypodermic syringes.

It had been the first time over his long career that he had been the victim of physical abuse and theft, the first time a gentleman's agreement among rogues had been broken.

Some of his hurt diminished when he had a chance to survey his laboratory and its equipment. All was intact. In the white heat of Zep Minone's greed and insatiable lust for drugs his mind had not had the time to think of any further destruction. He could even smile because in the face of all the deceit and abuse visited upon him, it would be Zep Minone who would turn out the eventual loser.

Still a bit groggy, DeGroppe now went to his supply closet at the rear of the lab and took the plastic mold down from a shelf. With it, he reeled

his way down the long hallway to the desk in his dimly lit living room where he took out the photograph Minone had approved as his new face. What had he said? A real All-American face, a real good-looking guy who'd definitely make it with the ladies. Looks that could kill, all right—or be killed.

DeGroppe let his eyes and mind linger over the mold and the photo, trying to imagine how it would be for Zep Minone and his new face. He should never have been so stupid as to hit him, or threaten him. DeGroppe might have complied with all his wishes, all his orders and ultimatums had he not done that. He would have made this final face the perfect, infallible omega in his long career—with just a little more work that had to be done.

The plaster mold and the photograph DeGroppe would save as small reminders to his past. The rest of his photos and molds could be destroyed; they would only be excess baggage for a man who now needed to travel as lightly and as quickly as he could.

But the doctor would be savoring all of it in the weeks to come, the years to come, however long his malfunctioning heart gave him. In two weeks, Zep Minone would be peeling away the temporary moulage to reveal to the world his new features, his new identity.

How did a man feel when life suddenly became a vast, zillion-pieced puzzle he could not put in place? How did a man meet new terrors? Strangers he did not know? Men who were another man's enemies?

Zep Minone was the only man alive who could articulate those feelings, those fears. He alone would soon know how long he was likely to last in the shoes of another human being, moving in his sphere, being introduced to his problems, living another man's terrors.

DeGroppe put the photo back into the desk drawer and walked slowly, but more steadily, back to his lab with the plaster mold, saying in a whisper—"Zep Minone, welcome to your new world. Welcome to the world of Eugene Bellasco!"

THE JUROR

by CLARK HOWARD

A New Truly Exciting Short Story Next Month



THE SHARK POOL

*Seductive, secret, she
waited. Was it Love —
or her dark sister, Death?*

by
**GARY
BRANDNER**

THE STATION WAGON sped north through the autumn dusk on the old California Coast Highway.

Wade Hennick glanced sideways at the woman in the passenger's seat. Much of her face was hidden

by the fold of dull blonde hair she liked to drop across her brow. It rankled Hennick that, although they were the same age, his wife's smooth features caused people to guess her at no more than thirty-two or thirty-

three. Only when the two of them were alone did the lines of her lower face relax into their habitual complaining droop.

"I think somebody's following us," she said.

"Naomi, don't be silly."

"There's not much traffic along here on a Monday evening, and whenever we get on a straight stretch I can see a pair of headlights just hanging the same distance behind us."

Hennick made an exasperated sound.

"Never mind," he said, "we'll be at Bella Beach in a few minutes. As I told you, it's less than an hour from Los Angeles, but you get a real feeling of being out away from it all."

"Big deal," the woman said.

"Don't be like that, Naomi. You seemed to think it was a good idea when I suggested spending a few days up here. You've been telling me how nervous you are lately."

"All right, all right. So for once you had a good idea. How come you're all of a sudden doing something just for me, anyway?"

"Believe me, I wish I could stay too," Hennick said. "But I can't leave Bob Jagger in charge of the office. He may be good at partying with the customers, but he's no manager."

"Mm-hmm. How come you never had him and his wife back to the house after the first time? That must

have been six months ago. Is there any trouble between you?"

"No trouble. The Jaggers are just not our kind of people, that's all."

"I'll have to agree that his mousy wife is a drag. I don't think she said six words all evening. What was her name?"

"Muriel. I suppose anybody seems quiet once Bob gets turned on."

"Maybe. Why are you stopping here?"

"I want to show you something."

"Are you crazy? It's almost dark."

"Come on, this won't take long. We're less than a mile from the hotel, and this is really something to see—a shark pool. Better wear your coat, it's windy on the cliff."

Naomi reached into the back seat for a long, dull-finished navy blue coat.

"I don't know why you wanted me to bring this ugly old thing," she grumbled. "It fits like a tent."

"It's warm," he said.

Hennick got out on his side and stepped around to open the door for his wife. She looked at him queerly, but climbed out and pulled on the coat. He led her off the road and along an overgrown path toward the sound of crashing waves.

The woman said: "I don't know what makes you think I want to look at a shark pool, whatever that is."

"It's where the drains from the hotel kitchen empty out pulverized garbage into the ocean. That attracts

the smaller fish, and they attract the sharks."

"That sounds delightful," Naomi said. "I never knew you were interested in nature. Is this where you've been coming on those mysterious Sunday drives of yours?"

"Sometimes. Here's the edge of the cliff. Just take a look down there."

There was enough light from the western horizon to show a jumble of broken boulders in the water far below. They formed an irregular pool, sheltered from the waves, in which vague black forms moved restlessly.

"Ugh, how repulsive," Naomi said. "You can keep your stupid shark pool. Let's go."

As she turned and started to walk past him, Hennick straight-armed Naomi hard in the chest and watched her stagger backwards and vanish over the edge with a look of unutterable surprise on her face. He stepped to the rim and looked down in time to see his wife bounce off an outcropping, sail spinning through the air, and smack against one of the half-submerged boulders. Then she slid limply into the water.

One of the shadowy creatures nosed at her tentatively, then struck. A second shadow hit her, and a third. Soon the shark pool was churned into an angry foam. Hennick turned and walked away.

Back on the highway a powder blue convertible had parked behind the station wagon. Hennick walked

to the rolled-down window on the driver's side and spoke to the dark-eyed brunette sitting behind the steering wheel.

"About twenty yards up the road there's a space where you can pull off behind a mound of dirt. The car won't be seen there from the highway."

The convertible moved away slowly and turned off the road at the spot Hennick had indicated. He followed in the station wagon and opened the door for the dark-eyed woman, who got in carrying a small suitcase. She wore a long, loose navy blue coat.

"It's over with, Fran," Hennick said when the woman was beside him. "I'm surprised how calm I was." He started the station wagon and drove north again on the highway.

"I told you you could do it, darling. Slow down while I get into the wig and shades."

She popped open the suitcase and brought out a blonde stretch wig. She pulled it on, tucking her own hair up underneath, then brushed a heavy lock of the wig hair down across her forehead. Next she slipped on a pair of huge purple sunglasses. The woman swiveled in the seat to face Hennick.

"How do I look?" she asked.

"Close enough," he said. "Just don't get too near anybody. Let whoever is at the desk get a quick glimpse of you tomorrow morning. Let him see you start walking south

on the highway. Make sure there's no traffic when you get your car out."

"Darling, I know what to do. Are you sure they won't be able to tell how long Naomi has been dead?"

"When the sharks get through there'll be just enough clothing and bridge-work left to identify her. You won't forget to wear that coat tomorrow?"

"I won't forget," she said.

Before taking the turnoff where a weathered sign pointed to the Bella Beach Hotel, Hennick braked to a stop and pulled the woman close to him.

"Damn," he said. "The worst part will be not seeing you for a while. We'll have to stay away from each other at least until after the funeral."

The woman held Hennick's head to her breast. "I know, sweetheart, it'll be tough for me too. Just think about how it's going to be when we're married and we have that great big bank account of your wife's that she hung on to so tight."

"You almost make it sound like we're doing this for her money."

"Of course not, darling. Let's go on into the hotel before somebody sees us parked here."

Hennick pushed the shift lever into *drive* and turned up the cracked asphalt roadway.

"It's ironic," he said. "When I was little my mother used to say, 'The sharks will get you if you're a bad boy.' As I grew up sharks became my private symbol of evil."

Anything or anybody that would hurt me was a shark in my mind. Now it's sharks—real ones—that are helping me get what I want most in the world."

"Sure. Here's the hotel; it isn't much, is it?"

The Bella Beach Hotel had taken an economic nosedive when the Coast Freeway bypassed it. Unlike others, it did not go completely under, but scratched along on the business of off-trail tourists and former guests reliving their memories.

The hotel was a low, wide structure with a couple of separate cabins on each side. A row of forlorn palm trees slumped in front of the buildings, trying to hide a paint job several seasons old. On the far side of the hotel a light surf could be heard sighing on the beach.

Hennick parked and walked through the entrance into a large lobby with dusty artificial palms and rattan furniture. On the walls were faded murals of a South Sea island that never existed. Under one of the murals was a desk of plastic bamboo. Behind the desk a gaunt man with spiky gray hair peered at a portable television set.

Hennick walked over to him while Fran waited in the doorway with her face turned away.

"I'm Wade Hennick. I called last week for a reservation."

The man at the desk pulled his eyes away from the television screen and ran a finger down a book that lay open on the desk. "Yes, here you

are. The reservation was made for only one person."

"That's right. I won't be staying, just my wife. I'll be back to pick her up Thursday."

"Okay. She's in number three. That's the first cabin on the right."

"Thanks."

While Hennick signed the registration card the desk man glanced at Fran. "Need any help with the bags?" he asked.

"No, thanks," Hennick said. "I can handle them."

The man relaxed and went back to his television show while Hennick walked out to the station wagon with Fran. He dropped her in front of cabin number three.

"Sure you don't want to come in for a minute?"

"You know I do, but I'd better not. I have to get a good night's sleep and be at the office early so I'll be there at the time my wife falls over the cliff."

"All right, darling. I'll let them get a look at me at eight o'clock and tell them I'm going for a walk before breakfast. Be good until I see you again."

"Right. Goodby."

In his office at Electrodata Corporation Hennick tried to focus his mind on the words of the report he was reading. His eyes kept sliding to the digital clock on his desk which now read 8:14 in white numerals on black.

He heard his secretary giggle at something outside the door, and

Bob Jagger bounced into the office, showing a mouthful of sparkling teeth.

He dropped into a chair across from Hennick without an invitation.

"So your wife's left you all by yourself for a few days, hey? Boy, I know what I'd be doing if I was in your place."

"I'll bet you do," Hennick said. "That just isn't my idea of fun. I've got plenty of work to do here and around the house to keep me busy."

"Why do you home-loving guys get all the opportunities?" Jagger complained. "With me it's always like this morning. Muriel leaves early to see some old girl friend, she says, and before I can get the smile off my face she tells me, 'Don't worry, I'll be home early.' Lucky old me."

"Too bad," Hennick muttered.

A buzzer sounded and he picked up the phone, punching the intercom button. The velvety voice of his secretary said: "You have a long-distance call, Mr. Hennick, from Bella Beach."

Hennick frowned and read the clock digits again: 8:31. He pressed the lighted plastic button on the base of the phone. "Hello. This is Hennick."

The voice that came over the line wobbled with emotion. "Mr. Hennick, this is the manager up at the Bella Beach Hotel. Something terrible has happened—it's your wife."

"Wh—what is it?"

"I can't talk to you any more now. You'd better come right up here."

The receiver went dead in Hennick's hand. He stared at it and cursed under his breath, then he dropped the phone back in the cradle and moved quickly for the door.

"What's wrong, Wade?" Jagger asked.

"I'm not sure. Take over here, will you, Bob? I won't be back today."

When Wade Hennick saw the two police cars parked in front of the hotel he froze to the steering wheel. He forced himself to get out of the car when a young uniformed policeman and an older man in civilian clothes came toward him.

"Are you Mr. Hennick?" said the older man.

"That's right."

He showed Hennick a badge. "I'm Sergeant Fallon. I'm sorry, sir, but your wife is dead."

"Dead? But how could that be?"

"Come with me, please. We have the woman inside. She won't say anything, but you might recognize her."

"Woman?" Hennick repeated, stumbling along between the policemen.

"She's in the lobby."

The three men went into the artificial South Seas lobby which looked even shabbier in the daylight. A third policeman stood behind one of the rattan chairs. Seated in the chair with her small mouth open and

her mouse-brown hair rumpled was Muriel Jagger.

"Mr. Hennick," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"Do you know this man?" Sgt. Fallon snapped.

"Yes. But why have you brought him here?"

"The woman you shot to death in Cabin Three was his wife."

"Oh, no, you're mistaken. I know Mrs. Hennick. The woman in Cabin Three is one my husband has been having an affair with for several months. I knew there was somebody, but I didn't know who until I intercepted a letter from her to my husband. It said she would be alone here for three days and told him where to come. There was no name, but the woman signed it with the initial 'F.' I drove up early this morning and knocked on her door. When she opened it I shot her. I should have told her why she had to die, but I was too full of hate to speak."

Muriel Jagger looked from the stony eyes of the policemen to the sick-white face of Wade Hennick. "But why ever did you think the woman was Mrs. Hennick?"

Sergeant Fallon moved over beside Hennick. He said: "I think we'd better have a talk, sir."

Wade Hennick nodded dumbly, unable to pull his gaze away from Muriel Jagger.

He had never before noticed the woman's pointy little teeth. Like a baby shark's.

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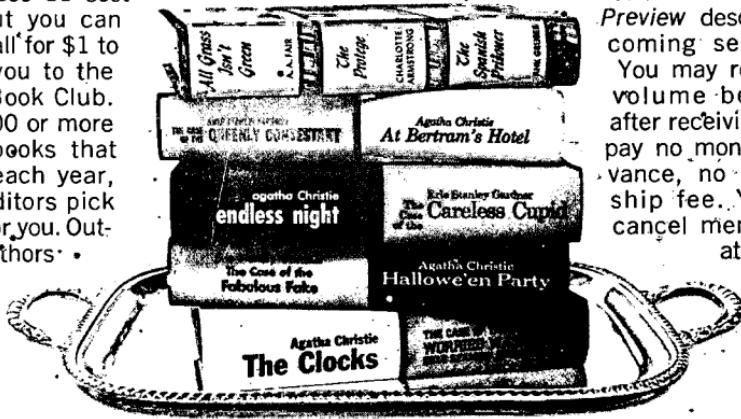
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